

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: “TO DWELL, I’M DETERMINED, ON THAT HAPPY GROUND”: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF A FREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN EASTON, MARYLAND, 1787–PRESENT

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As early as 1787, free African Americans began making homes in the Easton, Maryland, neighborhood known as The Hill. Over successive generations, The Hill became the cultural and residential center of Easton’s African-American community. The families, businesses, institutions, social fabric, and cultural values that the first generations of free African Americans in Easton created on and around The Hill greatly influenced the development of African-American culture through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of family and household structure, childrearing, religious life, and the memory and meaning of military service. Tracing these developments, with a focus on how African Americans and some white supporters worked together to combat slavery, racism, and other oppressions, illustrates how the politics of the freedom struggle were coded into everyday life. This investigation has also supported local grassroots efforts to preserve the legacy of that struggle on The Hill through public scholarship and practice, historic preservation, and community revitalization.

“TO DWELL, I’M DETERMINED, ON THAT HAPPY GROUND”  
AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF A FREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN  
EASTON, MARYLAND, 1787–PRESENT

by

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## Acknowledgements

This dissertation and the research it includes were conducted as part of The Hill Community Project, an interdisciplinary research project to support grassroots preservation and community revitalization efforts undertaken by Historic Easton, Inc., Professor Dale Glenwood Green of Morgan State University's School of Architecture and Planning, and the Town of Easton. It has been my privilege to work in Easton for and with its residents for the last several years. I arrived at the questions that frame this investigation through innumerable conversations with residents and community members with ties to The Hill. Chief among these in guiding my work have been Carlene Phoenix, president of Historic Easton, Priscilla Morris, treasurer of Historic Easton and a local scholar of Talbot County history, and Dale Green, who served as chief organizer and leader of the research team for The Hill Community Project.

I am indebted to my colleagues in The Hill Community Project research team for their efforts in putting together various pieces of the free African-American story in Easton. Foremost among these has been Cynthia V. Schmidt, the project's land records researcher. Cindy's research in property records and other associated archival records has been essential in determining the occupational histories of the archaeological sites in this study, as well as other sites nearby, which enables me to connect material evidence to the actual people who lived on and around The Hill. Cindy's dedication to accuracy has kept the project grounded in the local amidst national attention to the project and its potential. She discovered the stories of Grace Brooks, which I reproduce in part with reference to Cindy's work, and of James and Henny Freeman, whose 1787 lot is the first we know of in Easton to be owned by African Americans. We made this site the focus of excavations for three years. Other members of the research team include Yvonne Freeman, whose lived experience in the neighborhood helped interpret

children's toys from archaeological excavations and who worked tirelessly to connect members of her community with the past through this project, and Angela Howell, whose oral history interviews in 2014 with community members I use throughout this dissertation to help interpret the archaeological discoveries we made. Lyndra Marshall assisted me with genealogical research on the residents of the Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier site and Catherine Wilson provided genealogical research on Joseph Chain, early trustee of Bethel Church. I also worked with Cassandra Vanhooser and Patrick Rogan on public interpretation of research findings.

Although I served as the lead archaeologist on The Hill Community Project since my arrival in fall 2012, I conducted excavation and laboratory work as a member of the Archaeology in Annapolis Project, directed by Mark P. Leone. The degree of archaeological investigation we were able to conduct in Easton would not have been possible without the efforts of AiA staff, students, and the support of the University of Maryland. Mark Leone provided consistent guidance throughout the work in Easton and my fellow graduate students took time out of their own research to work on the project in Easton. Benjamin Skolnik, Kathryn Deeley, and Beth Pruitt directed the 2012 excavation at the Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier before my arrival on the project. During 2013 and 2014, I co-directed excavations at the Talbot County Women's Club and Bethel A.M.E. Church with Stefan Woehlke, whose experience in directing field projects helped me to learn to manage fieldwork on my own. Other, junior graduate students assisted me in directing summer fieldwork, including Sarah Grady in 2016, Andrew Webster in 2017, and Samantha Lee and Madeline Laub in 2018. As most excavations were conducted under the auspices of our annual field school and most laboratory processing and cataloging took place as part of an independent study program at the College Park campus of the

University of Maryland, many undergraduates also took part in excavations and laboratory work necessary for the analyses in this dissertation.

Our work in Easton would not have been successful without the welcome we received from the people of Easton, particularly the residents living on The Hill. As my colleagues, my students, and I became familiar sights in the neighborhood, many older residents went out of their way to make sure that we were familiar with the history of the places and people we were studying. They offered their own recollections and family stories, some of which I have included here. In addition, Asbury United Methodist Church actively supported our archaeological work by offering us the use of their parsonage for equipment storage, dormitory, and field laboratory. We have endeavored to be good stewards of the property.

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This dissertation is part of a historical, social, and political process in Easton. It is my sincere hope that it continues to contribute to the goals that the community of The Hill laid out for the preservation of their heritage, their neighborhood, and their community.

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## Introduction

*The first A. M. E. Minister, that I heard of, who visited the Eastern Shore of Maryland, was Rev. Shadrack Bassett. He came over from Baltimore and went to the town of Easton, in Talbot County, and preached under some trees, selecting for his pulpit a cart. He read for his opening hymn,*

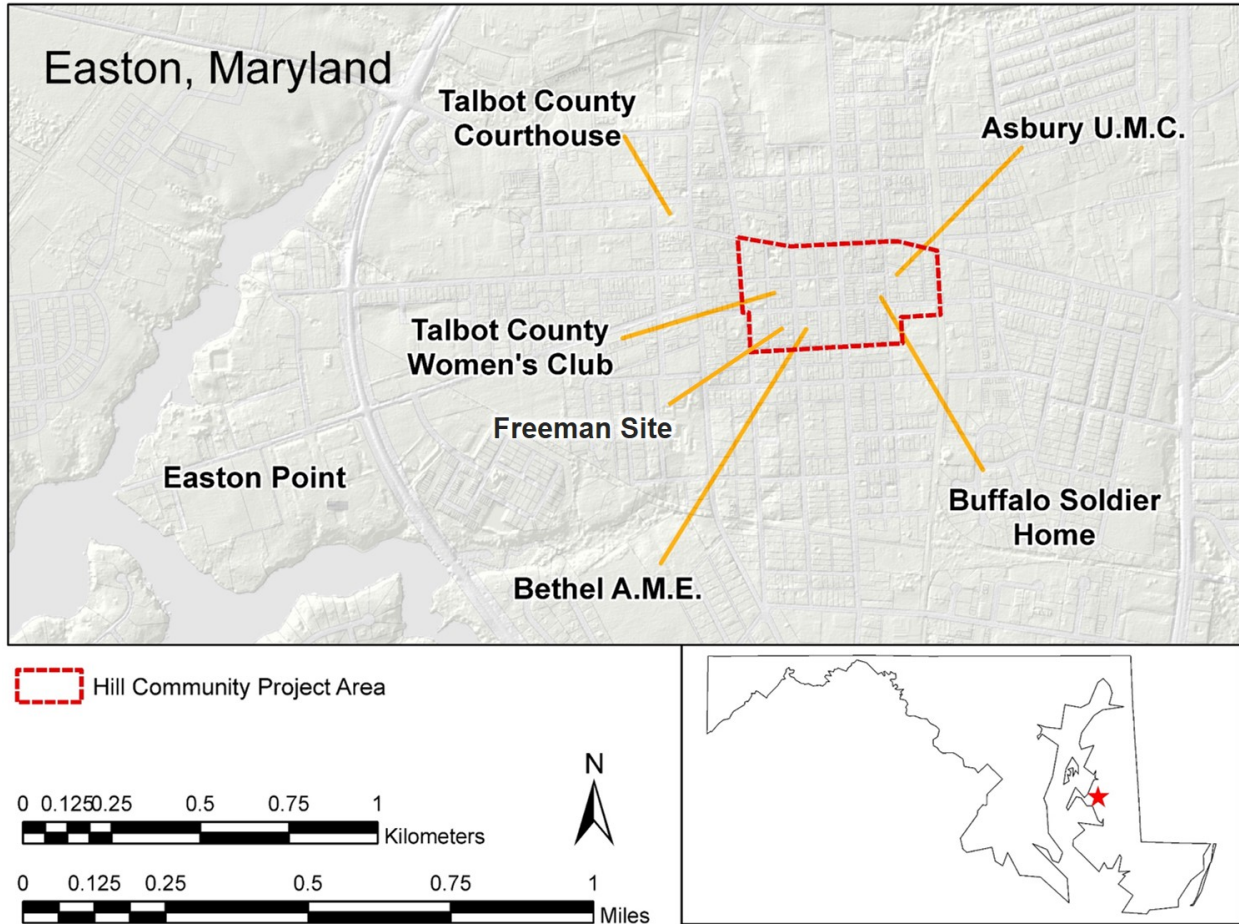
*“Oh! tell me no more of this world's vain store.”*

*And when he came to that verse:*

*“To dwell I'm determined on that happy ground,”*

*he pointed in a certain direction. The people thought that he intended to say, there was the place for him to build his Church. And upon that very spot the first A. M. E. Church of that region was built. (Wayman 1881:1).*

The opening words of African Methodist Episcopal bishop Alexander Walker Wayman's 1881 memoir of the early years of that church chronicle the organization in 1818 of the first A.M.E. congregation on Maryland's Eastern Shore. As an itinerant minister, Shadrack Bassett traveled throughout Maryland and Pennsylvania organizing populations of free African Americans into congregations and communities as he preached (Smith 1881:37–38). He arrived in Easton to the seat of a county in which there were 2239 free people of color (United States Department of State (USDS) 1820). According to local legend, the site of his sermon was the intersection of Hanson Street and South Lane, located in a neighborhood called The Hill (Dale Green, personal interview November 15, 2012). From the intersection where Bassett is said to have preached, the front of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is visible one and a half blocks to the south on Hanson Street on the lot acquired two years later by the congregation Bassett organized in 1818. Some oral tellings of Bassett's sermon suggest that he also pointed in a second direction, toward where Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church has stood since 1849 at the eastern terminus of South Lane (Dale Green, personal interview November 15, 2012). The Hill is the geographic center of a free African-American community that has lived in Easton for



**Figure 0.1:** Map of The Hill and archaeological sites in this dissertation. The red line delineates the project area. The boundaries of this area are Dover Street to the north, the former railroad to the east, Talbot Street to the south, and Harrison Street to the west. This is not entirely synonymous with historical geography of African-American landownership and residence patterns, which shifted over time. However, it serves as a heuristic tool for defining the area of study. The map also indicates the locations of archaeological sites featured in this study, along with the landmarks of the Talbot County Courthouse and Easton Point, neither of which were excavated.

more than two hundred years, anchored by family, by faith, by businesses, by landownership, and by collective memory. By the early nineteenth century, The Hill had become the geographic and cultural center of a growing free African-American community in Easton, a community whose descendants still live in the neighborhood today.

Bassett's selected hymn was written by eighteenth-century English Moravian minister John Gambold. Gambold was a friend of John Welsey's and it is probably through this

association that his hymns entered the Methodist repertoire. The complete stanza to which Wayman refers in his account is “A place I have found/Where true joys abound/To dwell I’m determined on that happy ground” (Allen 1818:113–114; Hymnary N.d.c) Within Gambold’s lyrical context, the hymn describes the joy of deep personal connection with the divine and the promise of life eternal in heaven. However, as Wayman’s account makes clear, the free African-American community assembled in Easton was not content to wait for a heavenly reward while friend and relatives remained in the chains of slavery and while they themselves faced racially-based restrictions on citizenship, economic mobility, freedom of worship, and self-determination. They staked a claim here, on The Hill, to a ground they could call their own, a ground they could call home. In the context of their struggle for freedom, the free African Americans gathered there transformed the symbolism of a heavenly home in the English hymn into something more concrete and deployed this web of symbols—the minister, the heavenly dwelling, the church family—through their worship and their building of a church in the service of collective self-determination. These symbols were brought together in this particular place when Bassett mounted his ox cart and began to preach.

Making a home was no easy task either for the first generations out of slavery, who had little or no savings and faced discrimination in the labor and housing markets as well as threats of re-enslavement. Working together and with white friends, African Americans were determined to have their rights sooner rather than later and built the quest for complete liberty into their everyday lives in ways that fundamentally shaped places like The Hill neighborhood in Easton. This dissertation is a study of some of the symbols and practices that bound individuals and families together in this pursuit from the late eighteenth century into the twentieth as they determined to dwell here on The Hill.

That determination continues among the descendants of those early freedmen and – women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has been put to the test. A half-century of disinvestment has left parts of The Hill in poor condition. Many black-owned businesses have disappeared and many houses are vacant and unlivable. In the early 2000s, there was discussion of demolishing the neighborhood to make way for a low-rise apartment complex like the one built over top of a cemetery on the other side of Dover Street and slightly east from The Hill. Against pressures of demolition by neglect, economic disempowerment, displacement, and gentrification, residents have organized to protect their homes and their community. Just as earlier generations of African Americans in Easton laid claim to The Hill as the place where they would build their lives and their culture free from bondage, so too are today’s residents committed to preserving and celebrating their heritage and to declaring that they are determined to dwell on this happy ground. Communities beset by external economic forces have turned over the years to a variety of strategies for exercising what activists have called “the right to stay put” (Newman and Wylie 2006), but historical preservation is not often among these strategies. Indeed, historic preservation often increases property values and accelerates displacement, particularly with respect to residents of lower socio-economic status (McCabe and Ellen 2018; McCabe 2019). On The Hill, neighborhood advocates have sought to turn this process around in the opposite direction.

### The Hill Community Project

The effort to protect The Hill and to achieve equitable development for this part of Easton started in the 1980s, when the East End Neighborhood Association (EENA) was



organized at Asbury Church. EENA was an interracial partnership among local residents and the organization lobbied the town for equitable investment in everything from trash collection to policing to sidewalk repairs. Historic Easton Inc. (HEI), the local preservation organization, eventually took over leadership on development and preservation issues (Personal interview with Priscilla Morris, January 2, 2020). In 2002, Charles Hines transferred his house at 323 South Street to the Easton Housing Authority. The house had become unlivable and repairing it was beyond Hines' capabilities. While going through the house before the transfer, he discovered a relative's discharge papers from 1907 and brought these to the attention of a historical researcher, Kearby Bon Parker, who raised the significance of the house's association with a Buffalo Soldier with Carlene Phoenix and Priscilla Morris, the president and treasurer of Historic Easton (Personal interview with Carlene Phoenix, December 17, 2019; personal interview with Priscilla Morris, January 2, 2020). Priscilla Morris lived on The Hill and Carlene Phoenix attended church in the neighborhood. In addition, Mrs. Phoenix's dual roles Historic Easton and in the Housing Authority, where she served as deputy director, invested in her a dual interest in the site and its preservation. Mrs. Phoenix and Mrs. Morris began fundraising work to restore the house but it continued to lie derelict for many years.

Meanwhile, Robert C. Willey became mayor of Easton in 2003. Mr. Willey entered office with the goal of stabilizing development in Easton by achieving a healthy balance of homeownership versus rental tenure in residential units. As he and Easton's town planner describe it:

WILLEY: The idea was not to put 'em [the houses that were eventually renovated under the Housing on The Hill Initiative] up for rent because renters tend to come and go and the homeowners would tend to stabilize the neighborhood a little bit... You get any number you want but we're roughly 50/50. Residential properties versus—uh—rental properties.

THOMAS: And significantly higher in The Hill.

WILLEY: Yeah, it's probably 80/20 or something like that. But the rental property seems to be transient and people are moving in and out until they can either find a home of their own or moving to another town because of work and what have you. But we...determined that 50% was just too much rental stock for us and what could we do to generate homeownership. And that kind of leads into where we are now. With...government assistance, we've been able to renovate some homes. We've been able to put up some...homes that could be purchased for homeownership and we've also been able to help people that were already in their homes—the neighborhood was pretty stabilized but they couldn't do the repair work that was necessary to stay there. So we've been able to help 'em do that...in fact, that program has developed almost town-wide now...From a—uh—homeownership standpoint, it's worked well. We don't have the loitering around the street corners. We still have it but we don't have it nearly to the extreme it was... The town is also putting money toward infrastructure improvements, along with some of the utility companies. ...We've had recreational facilities put in, park areas and so forth. ...And it's leading to more development, hence it's leading to more jobs. So it's just making it a little bit better for each person to come along and call the area home— (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Priscilla Morris worked with Mayor Willey at this time to conduct a door-to-door visual and photographic survey of all residential units in the town (Personal interview with Priscilla Morris, January 2, 2020). Mr. Willey's interest in stabilizing neighborhoods and development in them meshed well with the goals EENA and HEI had already set out to achieve but he did not initially focus on The Hill and progress in the town as a whole proceeded only very slowly.

The destruction in 2007 of an apartment house that had once been the historic Bronco Theater at the corner of South and Locust Streets lent heightened urgency to the need for preservation on The Hill (personal interview with Priscilla Morris, December 1, 2012). In 2009, Carlene Phoenix and Priscilla Morris attended a lecture by Morgan State University Professor of Preservation Dale Green at the Tidewater Inn on “The Uncanny Loss of African-American Churches on the Eastern Shore” and introduced him to The Hill. In 2011, they together launched The Hill Community Project.

Although he did not know it when he first became involved, it became clear throughout the course of research that Professor Green had several family connections to The Hill and the African-American community that called it home. His ancestors had lent Shadrack Bassett the ox cart from which he preached when he visited Easton in 1818 on behalf of the A.M.E. Church. Professor Green's grandparents had come to The Hill on dates when they were courting and shared their memories of the neighborhood with him in oral history interviews as he began to look into the neighborhood's history. These personal connections only excited Professor Green further over the work and he brought tremendous energy to the project, as well as the backing of Morgan State University and a position on the Maryland governor's Commission on African-American History and Culture, a body that promotes research and preservation of African-American heritage in Maryland through grants and advising. Professor Green also brought his expertise in architecture and preservation to the project and took on leadership of assembling a research team to provide research that he, Mrs. Phoenix, and Mrs. Morris could use to support the political fight for preservation and equitable development (Personal interview with Carlene Phoenix, December 17, 2019; personal interview with Priscilla Morris, January 2, 2020). Professor Green shared the results of that research as public spokesman for the project, making numerous presentations to various organizations in Easton and beyond and giving monthly—and sometimes weekly—tours of The Hill to local residents, as well as visiting tourists and schoolchildren. He also carried on much of the lobbying effort at the local and especially the state levels.

The interdisciplinary research team under Professor Green's leadership has, over the course of the project, included local land records researcher Cynthia Schmidt, genealogists Catherine Wilson and Lyndra Marshall, and oral historians Angela Howell and Yvonne Freeman,

who was raised on The Hill and who may be a descendant of James and Henny Freeman, the first free black landowners in Easton ca. 1787. Professor Green also convinced Mark Leone, professor of anthropology at the University of Maryland and director of Archaeology in Annapolis, who was then involved in excavations at Wye House Plantation north of Easton, to devote his project's resources to the work in 2012. Dr. Leone then recruited me as I entered the graduate program to devote my work to The Hill and this dissertation is the result of that focus.

For me, conducting archaeology on The Hill has been a thoroughly rewarding opportunity to support local community empowerment through research. I was drawn immediately to the broader social and political goals of the project and to its grassroots origins and close community ties. As a child, I watched my own suburban neighborhood in northern Virginia attempt unsuccessfully to organize and block the development of the last remaining farm into gated luxury townhouses. What I found in Easton was a community engaged in a similar struggle. As I have worked among the archaeological and historical records and talked with residents about their local heritage, I have also been keenly aware of just how little I knew coming in, as a white man and as an outsider to Easton, about the history of early African America and about the African-American experience in Easton. Most historical archaeologists in the twenty-first century appreciate the power dynamics and dangers inherent in writing about histories and cultures that are not our own, particularly where it concerns white scholars tackling black history (Blakey and LaRoche 1997; Franklin 1997; Epperson 2004; McDavid 2007). There are various models for collaborative practice that dislodges the privilege of the academic while acknowledging the particular skill-set we bring to a project, ranging from direct involvement of community members in archaeological fieldwork and analysis to the input of advisory boards on research design to consultation over whether research is done at all (Blakey

and LaRoche 1997; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2007; Little and Shackel, ed. 2007; Chidester and Gadsby 2009; Shackel 2011; Thompson 2011). The approach I have taken as lead archaeologist for The Hill Community Project has been to place myself at the disposal of the community and the goals of its leaders, principally Carlene, Priscilla, and Dale. In doing so, I follow in the track of archaeologists who have used the practice and findings of their research to support marginalized community's goals, even those goals not directly connected with history or heritage (Agbe-Davies 2010; Kiddey and Schofield 2011; Ferguson 2014). I have made decisions about where to excavate and what analytical and historical themes to pursue based on the needs of the preservation work and the aspects of The Hill's story that have arisen through many, many conversations with residents and community members as those which are most compelling and therefore most supportive of establishing the significance and preservation-worthiness of this neighborhood and its community. The result is not a complete narrative of The Hill or its residents, but one that surveys the breadth and depth of the heritage that early generations of free African Americans founded on The Hill.

#### *Public archaeology methods for The Hill Community Project*

The first site excavated archaeologically on The Hill, in 2012, was 323 South Street (18TA440), where a house was built in the 1870s. African-American Civil War veteran John Green and his wife Eliza Green because the site's first residents, but locals knew the site as the Buffalo Soldier Home after the 1907 discharge papers of Sergeant William Gardner of the 9<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry were discovered in a trunk in 2002 while the house was being cleared out prior to demolition (Parker 2002; oral history interview with Barney Brooks by Angela Howell,

April 30, 2014). The house remained in African-American hands until, like many other houses in the neighborhood, the Town of Easton designated it for demolition by neglect and it was to be razed. Historic Easton asked that this be the first site of archaeological research in order to use archaeology to help save the house. Two weeks of fieldwork in 2012 established the integrity of the site's stratigraphy and turned up two U.S. Army buttons, which are discussed in Chapter 4. These findings and the active presence of researchers on the site helped to save it and the details of our success in this regard are included in Chapter 5.

After this initial survey, and with the Buffalo Soldier Home standing for the time being under a stay of execution, I worked closely with Carlene Phoenix, Priscilla Morris, and Dale Green to build an archaeological research and interpretation program around key themes that would support the preservation and revitalization effort. In 2013, focusing on what was quickly becoming a public enthusiasm for determining the origins of the free African-American community on The Hill, we dug at what is now the Talbot County Women's Club (18TA439), which was a private residence for the Price family from 1795 to the 1860s and the Dawson family from then until 1891. At that time, it was carved into rental units for white middle-class families and rented until the Women's Club acquired and renovated the property in 1946. Shortly after James Price bought the house in 1795, he employed a free African-American woman as a nurse to a young orphaned white girl in his care. There was also some indication that other free people of color may have been on the property in the federal period (Jenkins 2015). It eventually turned out that there was not much archaeologically that could be directly connected with any early free people of color on this site. There is more material, and there are more identifiable stratigraphic layers, relating to the activities of enslaved domestic servants that James Price bought in the 1810s and to free African-American servants in the Dawson

household. The most artifact-rich layers date to the occupation of the site by middle-class white tenants in the early twentieth century. The Talbot County Women's Club site therefore serves as a useful point of comparison between the experiences of free African Americans living on their own at other sites and the experiences of their enslaved and white neighbors.

Next, we followed the importance of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Asbury United Methodist Church (historically Methodist Episcopal) to the community's collective psyche and dug in 2014 and 2015 at Bethel (18TA441), then in 2016 at Asbury (18TA442), in conjunction with renovation work there that year. Bethel Church was organized in 1818 and has occupied its current site since 1820. Asbury Church was formally organized in 1836 on Dover Street before relocating to Higgins Street about a decade later. Both churches have their origins in African-American Methodist activity in and around Easton in the late eighteenth century, a more complete treatment of which is in Chapter 3. At Bethel, we focused on two houses that were constructed near the church in the middle of the nineteenth century but had been demolished in the mid-twentieth century. One of these eventually served as a parsonage for the church. We searched for evidence of houses of worship previous to the current building, which dates to 1877, but were unsuccessful. Therefore, archaeological analysis at the Bethel site has focused on the domestic dwellings near the church rather than on religious activities themselves. In 2016, excavations at Asbury worked to support ongoing renovations to its 1876 building by surveying the site to locate cultural resources, during which time we found traces of the Tabernacle building that had previously stood behind the church. This became the focus of a more intensive excavation, giving us an opportunity to connect the material record of the site with oral histories of the Tabernacle, which had served as a high-school gymnasium

during Segregation. The results of study of the Tabernacle and Asbury Church's many connections between religion and education are included in Chapter 3.

From 2017 through 2019, we focused on the James and Henny Freeman site (18TA445). Cindy Schmidt's land records research for The Hill Community Project had turned up the Freemans as the first free African-American landowners in Easton. They probably bought their half-acre lot between Talbot Lane and Hanson Street at public auction ca. 1787, though the first written record of their ownership is James' will in 1799 (Schmidt 2016). Here, we found a rich archaeological record of life for some of Easton's earliest free African-American residents, including an extensive garden plot that the Freemans cultivated. A close study of that garden will be the subject of upcoming research. By the late 1800s, the site had been subdivided and a number of houses built on it, most of them owned or rented by African Americans through to the present. Much of the archaeological material from the site was excavated in the southwest quadrant of the original Freeman lot, where two of these later nineteenth-century houses had been torn down in the twentieth century, leaving behind traces of the lives of other African-American families living on The Hill. The Freeman site gave us the opportunity to again connect with excitement for The Hill's earliest history, to chart the African-American experience on The Hill through time, and to trace a family connection for Yvonne Freeman, a local police officer who grew up in the neighborhood and who had by that time taken on the oral history part of the research.

Throughout the project, we crafted the site selection and research design of the archaeological research on The Hill to place archaeology at the disposal of this local activist project. In addition to archaeological work on these several sites, I have shared documentary research notes with several other members of the research team and affiliated researchers: on



local churches with Carlene Phoenix and local Methodist minister and historian Gary Moore; on particular histories of people and properties with Priscilla Morris and with Cindy Schmidt.

Various forms of public engagement have remained essential to share research progress in such a way as to support lobbying and fundraising efforts. Excavation sites have always been open to the public for on-the-spot site tours by the field director and each summer has included an open house with a combination of site tours and artifact displays. Archaeologists from the excavation team have become regular attendees at the annual Juneteenth block party held by the Frederick Douglass Honor Society at the Academy Art Museum, which sits just outside the western edge of The Hill and takes place in the middle of June. The engagement strategy has always been flexible: I visited Asbury and Bethel Churches, as well as the nearby Third Haven Friends' Meeting, in the first two years. At these services, I attended worship and introduced myself and the project, forming some important relationships. In the winter of 2015/2016, I attempted to hold a weekly public archaeology lab in the evening during the week but cancelled it in May due to lack of attendance. In addition, various members of the project team have given presentations to community members over the past years in several different venues, including churches, the public library, the American Legion hall, and Easton's main theater. The process of public archaeology on The Hill has been one of consistently maintaining flexibility to meet people where they are and trying new avenues of engagement, which is essential to share research findings.

The mandate from the community for archaeological research on The Hill as represented to Archaeology in Annapolis by Carlene Phoenix and Priscilla Morris has been to construct useful histories through accurate and careful research that can help the community to protect its

heritage and its stake in The Hill neighborhood. This dissertation contains some of those useful histories, organized into four themes and constructed in dialogue with current community members. Together, they investigate four different sets of symbols and practices that have been employed in the creation and maintenance of community for free African Americans in Easton and on The Hill specifically. The themes and narratives that make up this dissertation do not constitute a complete history of The Hill. However, they have been used to develop parts of The Hill's story in ways that advance the community's ability to know its heritage, to defend that heritage, and to take active part in shaping the future development of the neighborhood. This dissertation concludes with an evaluation of how successful these efforts have been.

It is not typical to construct a dissertation out of the needs of a local community. To say that this dissertation is built around the construction of useful histories for the political purposes of the community based on The Hill is not to say that the research presented here is not new or relevant outside of Easton. On the one hand, discussions with members of The Hill community about their history and the articulation of oral history with archaeological evidence serves as an anthropological foray into the process of public archaeology. On the other, constructing histories that are useful in the local context has required engagement with some of the central questions of academic research into African-American communities before and after the Civil War: How did people re-build institutions that slavery had damaged or demolished? How did African-American culture develop? And how was the freedom struggle woven into everyday life? These questions are essential to the local effort to revitalize The Hill in accordance with its heritage because an argument for preservation that is effective with local and state governments must be one that demonstrates the integrity and significance of this neighborhood's story. After all,

integrity and significance are the core concepts upon which preservation legislation and funding in the United States are built.

### Historical Background

Free African-American communities emerged across the United States in the latter half of the eighteenth century as large numbers of enslaved Africans emerged from bondage. Economic shifts in the Upper South, Quaker and Methodist antislavery sentiment, and a Revolutionary ideology of equality and liberty contributed to large numbers of manumissions and Northern states abolished slavery altogether, albeit gradually. Many Africans performed extra work to save up to buy their freedom, while others absconded with themselves, taking advantage of the developing networks that eventually became known as the Underground Railroad. These newly free individuals and families organized into communities, the largest of which were in the Northern free states. In Talbot County, Maryland, approximately one out of every thirteen people by the first federal census in 1790 was a free person of color (United State Bureau of the Census (USBC) 1907). Though many lived and worked on the same farms and plantations where they had been enslaved (Demczuck 2008; Dorsey 2011:32–37), others formed black enclaves in places like Trappe, Chapel, and Easton (Talbot County Commissioners of the Tax 1812; Dilworth 1858).

Although they had escaped legal bondage, free African Americans faced continuing racism in the labor and real estate markets, restrictions on their rights to vote, hold property, bear arms, and represent themselves in court. These restrictions varied from state to state and through time, but they remained a barrier to true freedom and true equality (Berlin 1974). Moreover, a white-led movement to colonize free blacks in Liberia emerged in the early nineteenth century

and to remove them from the only home most had ever known (Walker 1830b; First Annual Convention of the People of Colour 1831:5; Second Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1832:9-10; Newman et al. 2001:90). Free African-American communities formed in order to provide mutual support in the face of these hardships and to pursue the abolition of slavery, the expansion of educational opportunities, freedom of worship, and other intersecting causes. Communities were held together by common understanding of these issues and by a discourse about the best strategies to act on them. They established mutual aid, religious, and fraternal organizations and an independent black press that gave inserted African-American voices into American civil discourse even while black people were denied the vote (Payne 1891; Logan 1995; Sterling 1998 [1973]; Newman et al. 2001). Religious denominations, the Colored Conventions that began in the 1830s, and the independent press were particularly central to connecting local free black communities into a larger network—a broader community—to expand mutual support, discourse, and action, including the operation of the Underground Railroad (Williams 1996; Colored Conventions n.d.; LaRoche 2014). Many of the institutions, perspectives, and strategies developed by free African Americans before the Civil War continued to shape black communities and black history after Emancipation as the same issues that mobilized antebellum communities took on new shape.

This historical literature on nineteenth-century free black communities like the one that emerged in Easton in the late eighteenth century is fairly well-developed after several decades of work. However, there is room for expansion that a historical archaeological approach is well situated to bring forward. Many studies use court records, laws, tax assessments, and other official documents to depict people's experiences (Berlin 1974; Rael 2002; Ely 2004; Myers 2011). These sources are immensely useful in describing the circumstances in which free black

people found themselves, but are often written by white people outside of black communities and do not capture completely what went on within these communities and the ways in which black people navigated their circumstances. Other historians (Sweet 1976; Horton 1993; Logan 1995; Sterling 1998 [1973]; Bethel 1999; Newman et al. 2001; Rael 2002; Ernest 2004; Newman 2008; Colored Conventions n.d.) have explored the internal workings of nineteenth-century free black communities and this literature is also fairly thorough. Free African Americans produced a rich print record of newspapers like the *Colored American* and *Freedom's Prophet*, pamphlets from Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's (2001 [1794]) "A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People during the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia", church and other organizational meeting minutes like those of the Colored Conventions first held in Philadelphia in 1831, personal letters, and books like Daniel Payne's (1891) *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, founded in 1816. Public speeches like those by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Highland Garnet (Logan 1995; Newman et al. 2001) were also sometimes transcribed and printed in these formats. These sources provide insight into the conversations and debates that animated individuals and connected communities across the country and even internationally. They illustrate free African Americans' perspectives on life, on historical developments, the issues that confronted them, and various strategies for elevating themselves and their brethren. These written sources are therefore a vital window into the animus of nineteenth-century free black communities and their politics.

However, because most of the available literature written by people inside these communities is written by black men, historical analyses of it tend to focus on men's perspectives and activities. And because most of the sources relate to publicly printed civil discourse, the community politics accessible through them tends to be a conventional sort of

politics—public debate, organizational meetings, speeches—in which men tended to be more visible, which reinforces a male bias in the historical record. Women were also present in more official community politics, where they participated in political conventions and mass meetings, gave speeches, and formed committees (Barkley-Brown 1994; Logan 1995). Here, they raised issues of education, family dynamics, racial prejudice in women’s movements, and the impact of patriarchy within black communities. And they did so in ways that highlighted the role many black women took as moral and cultural centers of their families and communities (Logan 1995). A focus on politics in the conventional, public sense underrepresents the kinds of everyday, often mundane activities that undergirded public discourse and action and made both possible, and in which black women often took central roles.

A few historians have shifted toward an analysis of the everyday domestic politics of nineteenth-century free black communities and a historical archaeological approach builds on their work. Erica Ball (2012) describes how an emerging African-American middle class used slave narratives to build models of courageous individualism but also of family values, while they developed a nineteenth-century black advice literature largely printed in African-American newspapers to guide spousal choices, marriage and family duties, and children’s education in order to prepare a community of people ready to sacrifice what the movement required to be successful. In these ways, the politics of free black communities was built into everyday life. The same roles black women played in plantation quarters—as mothers, cooks, and gardeners—and which made them central culture-bearers and community-builders who wove cultural modes of resistance into everyday life, remained important in freedom both at home and also at political gatherings (Tate 2003; Williams-Forsen 2015). Both women’s market-based work and their

cultural production in the home and in community spaces made women's work vital to everyday politics and life of free communities.

Historical archaeology is well-positioned to build on this work. Yet, a study of everyday politics in free black communities through material culture has only begun. Teresa Singleton's (2001) survey of three antebellum free black households excavated in Natchez, Mississippi, Chestertown, Maryland, and Alexandria, Virginia, highlights several strategies employed by individuals to enhance their social mobility but does not fully address the central role of collective action in social advancement. Cheryl LaRoche (2014) has developed a framework for identifying and locating free black communities within large social and geographic networks of antislavery resistance from a study of several free communities in the Midwest.

A great deal of research on the historical archaeology of plantation slavery and of post-Emancipation African-American life also connects with a study of free African-American communities that developed in the antebellum period because much of this literature highlights community-level resistance to slavery and to Jim Crow racism. For example, Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2011:98–104) demonstrates how slave quarter cooking areas became centers of production for a culture of resistance through the construction of meal schedules and social relations. In addition, enslaved people challenged the notion that they were property by, themselves, holding property. Store-bought ceramics, buttons, and other goods attest to slaves' participation in the consumer market (Galle 2006; Galle 2010). In the eighteenth century, pits dug into the floors of quarters served as personal storage boxes and the presence of locks confirms the securing of private property (Heath 1999:63-4; Samford 2007:146). Differential consumption among enslaved households helps to provide insight into social structures that enslaved communities created, which stood in opposition to those imposed on them by plantation

owners (Otto 1984; Galle 2006), while gift-giving indicates the use of material objects to create collective consciousness (Young 2004). These analyses of consumer goods become perhaps more important as African Americans entered freedom and became more active participants in the consumer market.

In addition, several studies of racial politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highlight the ways in which the most seemingly banal artifacts were a part of systems of oppression and emancipation. Christopher Barton and Kyle Somerville's (2012) analysis of racial iconography on mechanical (piggy) banks inculcated white children with racial stereotypes from young ages, while Paul Mullins' (1999a; 1999b) studies of food choice and bric-a-brac figurine collection (2001) illuminate a material dimension to African-American racial uplift strategies around the turn of the twentieth century. Kathryn Deeley (2015) expanded Mullins' studies in Annapolis, Maryland, to connect ceramic consumption patterns with the discourses within early twentieth-century black communities about racial uplift exemplified by the writings of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. These studies do for post-bellum archaeology what Ball does for the antebellum through written texts: to connect everyday practices with the broader struggles in which communities and their members were engaged. It is time we applied this same approach to antebellum free African-American communities and their later legacies through historical archaeology.

This dissertation begins this work through a focused study on one antebellum free black community that has been neglected from most histories of Talbot County, Maryland. Though the landscape of Maryland's Eastern Shore was dominated by plantation agriculture and plantation slavery from the seventeenth century through the Civil War, the town of Easton emerged in Talbot in the decades following the American Revolution as a major mercantile hub and free



African Americans contributed to the life of the town from the very beginning as merchants, like Joseph Chain, and urban farmers, like James Freeman, who purchased land in town at the very first public auction in the 1780s as one of Easton's original developers. These individuals and others built families, businesses, and cultural organizations that played a large role in making Easton a center not only for trade but for African-American life in the region (Wayman 1881:1–6). African-American Methodists already meeting and worshiping in Easton in the eighteenth century organized into Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1818 and Asbury M.E. Church in 1836. Both churches continue to serve the community today and later generations have continued the legacy started by those early free black residents.

Yet, African-American history has long been overlooked by historians of Talbot County and of its seat at Easton. Samuel Harrison's (1915) history of the county focuses on "the worthies of Talbot," the rich white men who controlled the county from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Henry Chandlee Forman's several decades of architectural research and preservation in Talbot and the surrounding region, which set the tone for historic preservation in Easton in the middle of the twentieth century and the development of a tourist economy that left out the black middle class on The Hill, focused almost exclusively on elite white architecture (Forman 1956). Dickson Preston's (1983) history of Talbot County and his chapter on Easton include some details about African-American life, but only in an anecdotal sense. Where these accounts do mention African Americans, the history of slavery vastly overshadows the history of freedom in local history. In contrast, Easton's community features prominently in Jennifer Hull Dorsey's recent (2011) historical study of free black work on the Eastern Shore in the federal period. Her studies of work, family structure, and religious life provide a firm foundation for a deeper analysis of everyday experiences through the material record and throughout the rest of

the nineteenth century. This study therefore fills a significant gap in local histories that has only partially been met.

Charting the development, shape, and character of the free African-American community that began on and around The Hill in the late eighteenth century amidst a landscape of slavery, and which set the tone in many ways for African-American life once slavery ended, anchors national developments in local places on The Hill and the lives of the people who lived here. It also relates national discourse in the context of the African-American freedom struggle to the political culture that supported it and the ways in which it was woven into everyday life on The Hill and in communities like it. In the process, the chapters that follow begin to craft a new narrative of what happened in this part of Easton and why this neighborhood's heritage is worth preserving.

### Theoretical Framework

A theory of community is necessary to bind together the study of The Hill's past with its needs in the present. Just as shared experiences, practices, ideas, and symbols helped to forge a sense of community in the past that organized collective and individual action in the struggle for freedom for African Americans living here, so, too, does the process of unearthing, remembering, and preserving that heritage involve collective practices that reinvigorate the sense of community among African Americans and their supporters as they continue that same struggle today.

This study focuses on collective political action and the ways in which it is constructed through material culture. Social and political movements are both products of the culture(s)

from which they rise and also produce their own distinctive cultures that are built around the values, identities, and practices of such movements (McAdam 2004). Politics necessarily involves the mediation of power and claims to it through cultural lenses that give power recognizable and practical shape. Power may be cited in the landscape or may be employed through material culture to send messages and shape people's actions (Molnár 2016:205–206). Most studies of social movements focus on political discourse and social networks (McAdam 2004:36–37) and, where archaeologists have ventured to study the material dimensions of protest cultures, it is easy to focus on the physical remains of particular events (e.g. Roller 2013) or on the physical media of protest slogans—picket signs, banners, and print media (e.g. Gledhill 2012). These are important areas of analysis. However, material culture is not just a part of collective political action as a facilitator of print or oral culture. Movements produce their own unique material culture as well, particularly recognizable in the art that comes out of protest action (e.g. Butler 1996). Movement ideals also transform everyday life and its material dimensions. As participants begin to bring about the change they want to see, they transform their lives and surroundings in ways that normalize or “domesticate” radical politics (McAdam 2004:46; Molnár 2016:207). In the modern capitalist world, this often involves turning political action into a commodity that can be consumed and thereby become part of the individual. When organized collectively, consumer choice can also influence producers and suppliers, generating broader change (Holzer 2006). Investigation into the consumption of politics through material culture has been fruitful for archaeologists (Mullins 1999a; Mullins 1999b; Mullins 2001; Deeley 2015). Material culture therefore becomes an expression of movement ideals and also a practical means of achieving them.

As a result of its focus on the material culture of collective action, this study relies on a theory of communities in order to explore the ways in which social causes are constructed and navigated through collective social identities and social relations. Politics is cast as systems of oppression and struggles for emancipation within an intersectional framework. The relation of everyday practices and material culture to these systems and struggles is framed through practice theory and the concept of *habitus*.

### *Community*

Community is a social and cultural process of identification that organizes people together in order to work collectively for shared goals. In this sense, it is similar to class consciousness but refers to more concrete cultural and social practices and can relate to any range of issues and values: a business community collaborates to create economic opportunities for profit and to lobby for legal structures that facilitate the process; a community of birdwatchers shares knowledge about bird species and where to find them, and may also organize to advocate for environmental protection. These communities do not come into being on their own, but must be created and maintained through various cultural and social strategies that reinforce collective identity and values, as well as particular responsibilities that members have to one another (Yaeger and Canuto 2000:5–6).

If this sounds utopian, it is. Sort of. But not necessarily. A sense of community can be mobilized by an oppressor to turn focus away from oppressive conditions toward some other facet of life or it may be mobilized by subjugated people in order to bind together those with shared stakes in a political struggle to work for one another's benefit. Community is produced as

each class (in the broad sense, not only economic) tries to coopt the other into supporting it. So we may see those who we tend to call community leaders, those who most actively promote and sustain community sentiment, as social strategists using group membership to actively shape the actions of others to their advantage (Harvey 1987:87–8). And because political positions and identities intersect, there is often a refining effect to focus on commonalities over differences such that these two opposing strategies are not mutually exclusive and can both operate in the same action by the same person. So we can ask: what issues are being advanced to tie together a particular community? What issues are being left out? How does group membership change as a result of political strategies or vice versa?

Community has a physical dimension but should not be confused with neighborhood. In order for people to be organized in terms of identity, values, and actions, there must be regular interaction. However, this does not always have to occur face-to-face. Early theorists of community like Marx (sometimes, though not always—see, for example, Marx 2015 [1887]:30), Tönnies (1974 [1887]), Durkheim (for a discussion, see Elias 1974:xii), and Redfield (1962 [1947]) contrasted community as a small-scale and local phenomenon with the complex workings of modern, capitalist society. And certainly the scales of human interaction have increased over the years with communications and transportation technologies, as well as changes in the structure of economics and politics (see, for example, Muldrew 1993:182). But a sense of community does not arise naturally or necessarily from close proximity any more than it is precluded by distance. Instead, it must be imagined (Anderson 1991) in the course of human interaction. The form and regularity of that interaction is, of course, flexible. Neighborhood is often a space in which public and private interests and practices merge in dynamic ways: “as the boundaries of social groups change or expand, new forms of territoriality and distancing are

required” (Suttles 1972:82–93). However, we can cast *neighborhood* as a single tenement, a city block, or a region of several states depending on the kinds of social interaction and group identity we’re talking about. This enables us to ask: where and when is community reinforced? What role do spaces and places play in its negotiation? At what scales are communities organized?

Communities are social and cultural constructs, imagined into being and reinforced through social practices and common terms of understanding the world. This does not mean, as anthropologist Robert Redfield (1962 [1947]:572–80) suggested, that they are culturally homogeneous. However, there do have to be some key shared meanings and values that knit the group together. This is what historian William Sewell (2005:166) calls a *semiotic community*. This enables us to ask: what commonly-held symbols, either words or images or objects, create the basis for mutual understanding, shared identity, and solidarity of action within a community?

This framework for understanding community helps to critically position nineteenth-century free black people, their social networks, their culture, and their politics so that we can understand how they came together—and how they did not—to work for common goals.

### *Intersectionality*

Although this study focuses on free African Americans, the concept of community framed above is not a reductively racial one. Oppressions and alliances in resistance to them extended also along class, gender, and other lines. It is not inevitable that all people of African descent in a particular area will coidentify with one another as a group and, even where they do, there is diversity within such a community because of the cleavages that split it. In addition,

while we can speak of African-American communities, the bonds of community sentiment, support, and responsibility that supported emancipatory projects created community across racial lines, especially with white Quakers and Methodists. Therefore, this study employs an intersectional lens to understand the complexities of oppression and liberation.

Intersectionality can be considered a theory, a movement, or a paradigm, depending on the task at hand and on how we choose to draw its genealogy. Collins (2015) refers to it as a field of study that focuses on groups and individuals who sit at the margins of our usual categories of analysis, an analytical framework for interrogating the complexities of power and identity, and a critical praxis that helps us forge coalitions for more effective social justice campaigns. The term itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) but refers to a body of black feminist thought and action stretching back into the nineteenth century (Brah and Phoenix 2004). Intersectionality has been only recently introduced into archaeology (Franklin 2001; Conkey 2005; Gellar 2009; González-Tennant 2011; Battle-Baptiste 2011; Sterling 2015; González-Tennant 2018). Intersectionality is, at its core, the understanding that systems of power are interlocked. Capitalism, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, colonialism, etc. each reinforce and give shape to one another as elites construct their domination of the world and everyone else scrambles to get what they can by leveraging one form of privilege over the lack of another. Black women saw this to be true as they found themselves repeatedly sidelined by both anti-racist and feminist movements despite their longstanding involvement in these efforts (Combahee River Collective 1978; Lorde 1984; Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2002; hooks 2015). As a result of these intersections, any struggle against one form of power that does not also work against all the others is necessarily incomplete. Adherence to such a “single-axis framework” of activism precludes a bottom-up approach to change: “the possibility that there is more to gain by

collectively challenging the hierarchy rather than by each discriminate individually seeking to protect her source of privilege within the hierarchy” (Crenshaw 1989:145). What intersectionality highlights in part is the need for alliances across campaigns of activism.

Intersectionality will be used here as a theoretical tool for evaluating interlocking oppressions in the lived experiences of nineteenth-century free African Americans in order to locate the political struggles of these individuals, households, and communities and for tracing various emancipatory projects in the archaeological record. Interpretations of the meaning of artifacts, symbols, and practices within these struggles will draw on the intersectional method developed by sociologists working to empower Asian immigrant women in San Francisco:

Every person is a crowd, characterized by multiple identities, identifications, and allegiances...collective political struggle requires the creation of strategic group positions adaptable to forging coalitions within and across identity groups. These positions are always partial, perspectival, and performative (Chun et al. 2013:923).

Community sentiment is one such strategic group position. It therefore becomes possible to index what is going on in a particular moment in a household or in a community discourse or event and to identify what issues and emancipatory projects are being emphasized or de-emphasized in a given moment and therefore to trace the changing face of community politics over time. For example, in chapter 4, I discuss the use of military service as a pathway to citizenship for African Americans. Because military service in the nineteenth century was exclusively male, this particular strategy for racial equality focused on masculine valor and male citizenship. Women supported these efforts, though they did not directly benefit from them in the nineteenth century.

As it relates to the process of community, intersectionality helps to avoid homogenizing the black experience and to identify both places where commonality of purpose and strategy converge and diverge within Easton’s black community, as well as moments where the interests



of African Americans overlapped with those of other groups. Chapter 2 explores the differences in African-American childhood experience along gender lines as an emerging black middle class in the nineteenth century drew on and reinterpreted white middle-class gender ideals. The discourses of this black middle class, which birthed a free black press in the 1830s, are also not necessarily characteristic of the masses of working-class African Americans, who left far less of a written record. The complex tapestries of cultural life, social relationships, and political action that an intersectional approach helps to reveal make it difficult to paint a picture of Easton's free African-American community at any point in time and say, "this is complete." However, delving into particular aspects of this community's story from an intersectional perspective allows for a more inclusive picture of The Hill to begin to emerge.

### *Habitus*

There are many ways of approaching the relationship between people and artifacts. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *doxa* and *habitus* are particularly useful in understanding the production of community within a political space. To make sense of the workings of different kinds of power and differential experiences of them in regards to one's position in them as they work through the physical landscape and the artifacts and features that make it up, Battle-Baptiste writes:

*habitus* also assisted me in comprehending how social systems are predisposed to function in particular ways, generated by the practice of creating a conscious need for people within a particular group to understand and master skills needed for survival in any given society (Battle-Baptiste 2011:98).

In other words, the rules of the game of life—Bourdieu calls these rules *doxa*—are learned through shared experiences, especially while growing up, which teach us how the world is

structured and what our place in it is. People with similar experiences come to see the world in similar ways based on their shared position within society, which is how we get class or racial habitus/worldviews that are different. These groups play by different rules (see Bourdieu 1977 [1972]). Particular communal practices, and systematic individual ones, thus take on a structuring role (Battle-Baptiste 2011:98). Because habitus is about orienting individuals to their place in the world and how to navigate the world from that position, the positioning and motion of people with regard to objects and spaces takes on new meaning, even and perhaps especially in the most mundane aspects of life.

Sites that produce social relations are particularly important in creating habitus. Whitney Battle-Baptiste connects habitus with bell hooks' concept of "homeplace," which for the purposes of the archaeologist she transforms into "homespace." Communal spaces like the quarters of plantations, like churches, and like the woods, are about more than just domination and straight-up resistance; they are where the oppressed come together as a community to figure out how to navigate their condition and to develop a culture that helps them do that (Battle-Baptiste 2011:98-9). The structure of this culture establishes a set of rules that is different from the rules a dominant culture lives by but not wholly independent from those rules because both are based on the same objective reality, albeit on subjectively different perception of it depending on position relative to this field of play—play is the wrong word for something so serious, but it is Bourdieu's metaphor. There is plenty of room here for W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness" (1903) when talking about different sets of rules. Physically speaking, Dell Upton refers to these as "Black and White Landscapes" (1988). The question becomes: How are symbols and practices organized in space to create certain sets of rules for certain people? How do changes in these symbols and practices relate to efforts to change the rules of

the game of life? An intersectional analysis would also ask how, since Bourdieu's class habitus is based on a single line of cleavage, we might get many intersecting and diverging habitus by considering more than one cleavage point—or what symbols and practices might reduce such cleavages to reinforce broad doxic structures in the creation of a more or less unified group identity and habitus at various levels of community.

Using the concepts of *habitus* and *doxa* within an intersectional lens enables an analysis of material culture on The Hill with a view to how community identity and collective action were constructed from the early nineteenth century onward. Artifacts and features can be interpreted based on their structural relations to one another and also to the political discourse preserved in the written historical record. However, material culture enables a study of the often mundane everyday activism that enabled the sorts of protest discourse and action events that are typically represented in the written record and this study will take this everyday activism as its focus.

An understanding of community as a complex process that is constantly underway shapes both the research design and practice for this application of scholarship to questions of community on The Hill. Archaeology on The Hill, as well as accompanying documentary research, have taken a community survey approach. Since 2012, the University of Maryland's Archaeology in Annapolis program has excavated portions of two church sites and three domestic residences spanning the length of the neighborhood and its occupational depth in time. Some sites were inhabited more intensely at certain times than others and these sites speak to different segments of the African-American population, to different aspects of their lives, as well as to change in the African-American experience in Easton over time.

African Americans living on The Hill built community relationships through reconstituting the family life that had been ruptured by slavery, worshipping together as sisters

and brothers in the church family, , through mutual aid and the sharing of resources, and by exchanging ideas about pathways for racial uplift and collaborating on shared goals, both within the close local community here and with other free African-American communities across the country through the black press and the movements of itinerant ministers, and larger gatherings and conventions that built a larger, national and international sense of community among free African Americans. All of these practices that created a sense of community between people and families, friends and neighbors, were built into everyday life in ways that leave traces in the historical and archaeological record.

### Structure

The following chapters survey some of the key practices and symbols by which free African Americans built a sense of community on The Hill from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth. The first two chapters take into consideration the effort that African Americans made to take control over their own biological, social, and cultural reproduction, a control that had been denied them while they were enslaved. Chapter 1 uses census data to examine demographic trends in the free African-American population in Easton and Talbot County in order to investigate the family structure that provided the foundation for social organization at the community level. Chapter 2 explores the values that African-American parents in the nineteenth century instilled into their children through toys and stories. These values adapted the gender norms of American society to the struggle for freedom and equality, preparing each generation for the unequal world they were to enter. Taken together, these first two chapters begin to build an understanding of the struggle for self-determination that the individuals, families, and community on The Hill made in the past. This historical struggle is

fundamentally linked to that of current residents fighting to remain in their neighborhood. This current struggle is a continuation of the centuries-long fight for freedom.

The second section of this dissertation takes a closer look at the social and cultural life of the free African-American community on The Hill. Chapter 3 describes the ways in which churches were central to establishing, maintaining, and coordinating unity of purpose within and between free black communities. This was particularly true when it came to education, in which Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church particularly took an interest. Chapter 4 charts the type and locations of military artifacts from excavations on The Hill. When taken as a whole, these militaria indicate that discourses about armed service and its significance to the freedom struggle permeated the entire community.

Communities like the one centered on The Hill together established everyday culture, building political meaning into even the most mundane parts of life. From questions over the building of home life and how to raise children to religion, education, and collective memory, the social relationships and cultural values and ideas that free African-American communities built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries set the stage for the continuation of the freedom struggle after the ending of slavery and on into the present. In places like The Hill, that heritage of struggle must not be forgotten if the work of previous generations is to continue.

## **A Note on Reproduction and Autonomy for African-American Individuals, Families, and Communities**

When she died in 1810, Grace Brooks left an estate worth \$142.56, including a house and land, to her grandchildren Phill, Jane, Nancy, and Grace (Talbot County Court 1810–1812:14; Schmidt and Robinson 2016:2). Her ability to do so marked a sizeable achievement for a woman of color born into slavery on a farm four miles south of Easton. Brooks served Easton’s black and white families as a midwife for many years, elevating her to a considerable position of respect. On the occasion of her death, the writer of her obituary<sup>1</sup> remarked,

Yesterday, the 12<sup>th</sup> instant [of March 1810], Grace Brooks of this town, and a native of Talbot county, departed this life, aged perhaps near seventy years, after a tedious and pining decline of some years, which she sustained with all the Heroism and Resignation of a patient Christian, which the members of the Socety, to which she attached herself are ready to bear witness to.

Although of sable hue, by her industry and economy, after emancipating herself, her children and grandchildren, she has left decent property to her descendants. Philis Wheatley and Benjamin Banniker, have left memorials of their talents, that while the page of history continues, will never be obliterated; and so Grace Brooks has left an impression on the hearts of all who knew her many virtues and services, that will never be forgotten while they possess recollection—white and black, are the offspring of the Divine Creator (*Republican Star* 1810:3).

The Hill Community Project land records researcher Cynthia Schmidt rediscovered Grace Brooks’ obituary in 2013 and uncovered her story further through subsequent research (Schmidt 2013; Schmidt personal correspondence February 2, 2015; Schmidt and Robinson 2016; Schmidt personal interview August 9, 2018). Brooks was born into bondage in 1740 on the Taylor farm south of Easton and grew up alongside Rachel Taylor, who married James Dickinson. Taylor

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt (personal interview August 9, 2018) speculates two possible author of this warm obituary. The first is James Price, who was the county register of wills and who appears to have hired Brooks in the 1790s to care for an orphan girl placed under his guardianship (Schmidt personal communication February 23, 2015). Brooks named Price executor of her will (Schmidt and Robinson 2016:2). The second possible author is Robert Moore, who was a local Quaker and a doctor (Priscilla Morris personal communication November 9, 2016).

brought Brooks as a slave into her marriage and Brooks worked in the house as a caretaker for the Dickinson children. She also spent time working outside of the Dickinson household, applying her skills with midwifery and nursing to earn an income for herself even while still enslaved. After Rachel's passing, Grace stayed with James until his death in 1787, when John Singleton inherited her and others enslaved. In January of the next year, Brooks bought her freedom and that of her daughter Phebe and her granddaughter Priscilla from Singleton for £70 with money she had saved. In 1792, she leased a lot in Easton on the west side of Hanson Street from Henry Nicols. In Easton, no longer bound by servitude, Brooks continued and expanded her work as a midwife and nurse. She may have worked for a time for James Price, a young white clerk of the county who found himself not entirely prepared to take care of the young orphan girl of whom he became guardian in 1794. Brooks later named Price as executor of her will (Schmidt and Robinson 2016; Schmidt personal communication September 23, 2019).

Brooks' work as a midwife gained her contacts and support throughout both the black and white communities. The depth of her neighbors' affection for her shines through her glowing obituary. It also enabled her to support both her family and her community. In 1794, she purchased her son David from John Singleton, her former owner, and her granddaughter Nancy Walker from Samuel Logan. By 1798, she had erected a one-story dwelling on her property and she allowed her friend, Suky or Susan Bailey, who was still enslaved, to live on a portion of her lot. Brooks stipulated in her will that Bailey could continue to live there after her death. Ultimately, not all of Grace Brooks' wishes for her family and community were fulfilled on her death. Robert Moore, who handled her estate, and Henry Nicols asserted to the court that Nicols' agent Alexander McCallum had acted improperly in leasing his lot to Brooks, so her family was unable to inherit the house and land she left them (Schmidt and Robinson 2016).

However, through her hard work and thrift, Brooks left her grandchildren with money to support them and something more valuable still: their freedom. And the respect she earned in the black and white communities of Easton accorded Brooks a measure of equality. Schmidt notes that, while most official records designate people of color as “negro,” Grace Brooks’ probate inventory refers to her simply as “Grace Brooks, late of Talbot County” (Schmidt personal interview August 9, 2018; Talbot County Court 1810–1812:12–15)<sup>2</sup>. In this small way, Brooks, born into slavery, managed to reclaim her humanity in the eyes of a white oppressor state.

As a midwife, Grace Brooks’ work and her prominence in Easton stand as symbols of the struggle of all free African Americans in Easton from the late eighteenth century onward to gain a measure of control over their own destinies as individuals, as families, and as a community. Midwives provided prenatal care, guidance on contraception and abortion, aid during childbirth, and early postnatal care as well. These services parallel the fundamental human rights that have shaped black women’s struggles for reproductive justice from slavery to the present: the right to bear children, the right not to bear children, and the right to keep and raise the children they have. These principles were codified in the intellectual frameworks of the Reproductive Justice Movement that coalesced in the 1990s, led by African-American women and women of color of other backgrounds, but they are based in centuries of historical experience at the intersections of power structures, particularly race and gender, that have denied complete reproductive self-determination to women of color and the communities of which they are members (Ross et al. 2017). These black feminist principles provide an essential framework for understanding family

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<sup>2</sup> Her will refers to her as “Grace Brooks, a free black woman of Talbot County” (Talbot County Court 1804–1812:312).



life for The Hill's residents in the past, as well as the current struggle for community self-determination.

Slavery did tremendous damage to the black family. Slaveowners manipulated and hijacked family life among the people they held in bondage so that spousal and parental relationships were usurped into the system of slavery as the essential basis of the means of the reproduction of labor—a labor that was itself expropriated. Masters used a variety of means to subvert reproduction among enslaved families for their own economic gain. They beat pregnant women when they did not work fast enough (Davis 1998[1971]:117). They also caused enslaved women to bear their children—whether through force or otherwise—and incentivized procreation among slaves (Schwartz 2006:13–31), then disregarded parental bonds in the sale and separation of parents and children (Schwartz 2006:212; *Provincial Freeman* 1854b; Davis 1998[1971]:113). Family structure among slaves thus became subordinate to the power relations of master to slave, reducing the authority of both black men and women in their own households. Spouses and parents were powerless to stop their owners from disintegrating their families through sale or transfer (Davis 1998[1971]:112–113). The image of the babe torn from its mother's arms at the auction block well deserves its place among the chief horrors of slavery. The system of bondage denied men and women the opportunities to be complete husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. Women were forced to take a subordinate place of household drudgery but not accorded the supposed benefits of femininity (protection from the outside world). Men were not allowed superior positions (protector, provider) because it would embolden them. As a result, black women were not allowed to be fully women and black men were not allowed to be fully men (Davis 1998[1971]:116). Although they managed in many cases to put together a semblance of family life, it was incomplete.

Within these contexts, reconstructing some semblance of family life became an act of resistance. Enslaved women took leadership in ensuring the physical survival of the community (by bearing children) and “the mission of promoting the consciousness and practice of resistance” (Davis 1998[1971]:113). Resistance was integral to slavery. As such, it had to be nurtured by a social structure and this took place in the slave quarters as the place furthest removed from owner power. Because the women held sway in this domestic arena, as defined both by the paternalism of white America and that of Africa, they therefore held responsibilities for food preparation, childrearing, sewing, cleaning, etc. (Davis 1998[1971]:115). Survival (foodways, childrearing) was both a form of resistance and the prerequisite of any more elaborate resistance (Davis 1998[1971]:116). “The slave system would have to deal with the black woman as the custodian of a house of resistance” (Davis 1998[1971]:118). However, enslaved women did not face the system and its agents alone. Women tended to develop a close network because they were separated from the men often during work, given shared tasks in both work and domestic duties. They also became interdependent, especially when it came to medicine and midwifery and childcare (White 1985:121–9). This network of strong bonds between women provided a basis for collective action and organizing resistance. This was an insurgency that penetrated into daily life. Slaveowners in turn maintained a counter-insurgency of surveillance, infiltration to turn slaves against one another, and intimidation. In light of enslaved women’s roles in fostering a resistance culture, rape and the threat of rape by overseers and owners was a form of terrorism designed to dissuade her from organizing any resistance. This is seen in every society in any capacity where the woman may challenge authority (Davis 1998[1971]:124). Despite challenges and retaliations, African Americans in slavery did their

best to piece together family life as a form of resistance in itself and also as a basis for a broad culture of resistance.

Free African Americans worked to reconstruct family life once they escaped bondage. Indeed, it became one of their chief goals (Dorsey 2011:69). As they did so, women retained their central social and cultural roles in household and community. Black women worked for wages to supplement the family income, their labor vital to basic survival of the family (Davis 1998[1971]:126). Black women also participated actively in community affairs and political organizing. In her 1832 *An Address Delivered before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston*, Maria Stewart issued a special call on women to step up as the group upon which “the rising generation” depended (Stewart 1995 [1832]b:16). As they had in the slave quarters, free African-American women continued to encourage resistance and to foster the culture behind movements for social change. As W.E.B. Du Bois put it in *Darkwater* in 1920, “In the great rank and file of our five million women, we have the up-working of new revolutionary ideals, which must in time have vast influence on the thought and action of this land” (Davis 1998[1971]:126). Uniting families and keeping them together healed one of the wounds of slavery and also facilitated the construction of a collective resistance culture at the family and community level in order to work toward the fulfillment of their humanity (Battle-Baptiste 2011:88–89; Ball 2012).

Many nineteenth-century white American families also valorized women’s roles in the domestic arena. As white middle-class culture arose in the 1840s, it defined for itself archetypal gender roles known sometimes as the cult of domesticity. Sufficient income enabled middle-class women to stay at home and focus on domestic tasks and middle-class ideology divided the world into separate spheres of public and private, dominated by men and women, respectively.

Mothering and work were cast as separate pursuits. Whereas the outside world of law and politics and economy were nasty, messy, and cruel, white middle-class Americans held the domestic realm to be kind, gentle, clean, and pious. They elevated the domestic realm to a holy place and idolized a kind of femininity that dwelt in sacred seclusion in this domestic world (Collins 1994:45–46; Ball 2012). White middle-class women reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus saw the so-called domestic temple as a prison and motherhood as a burden thrust upon them (Grand 1894; Wilkie 2003:154). This dichotomy never really applied to women of color, however, who typically could not afford not to work. Even those who could knew that there was no escaping the oppressions of the world in which they lived. They did not have that privilege. As a result, the public and private, work and mothering, remained intertwined and both the family structures and political economies of families of color, middle-class and working-class alike, remained distinct from those of the white middle class.

Some nineteenth-century middle-class black men wanted to replicate this gendered separation of the public and private spheres in African-American households. Rev. C. Ransom (1897) wrote of “the sanctities of home, of wifehood, of motherhood” when describing the values of Christianity he felt earlier generations of African Americans had poorly grasped—his language reflecting the cult of domesticity. An anonymous contributor to the *Christian Recorder* in January of 1888, while seeming to applaud the growing “recognition of woman as the other side, the equal side, if not the better side of man,” doubles backward to wonder

whether, in our efforts to grant her all the honors due, we may not be in danger of robbing woman of the very ability to maintain those qualities that conquer and compel our devotions. Women are not only filling pulpits (which may be well enough), but they are clerking, pleading law, managing railroads and managing other large secular and coarser work (*Christian Recorder* 1888d).

The author answers their own rhetorical question: “It will be a sad day for the world when equality before the law shall mean that woman may legally be placed in any position that State or Church has to give; when she will be taken from home to attend the hard affairs of State” (*Christian Recorder* 1888d). Similarly, two years later, A.M.E. minister R. Seymour wrote against the suffrage movement:

The woman suffrage vanishes before the simple fact of womanhood. Equal to the man do they say? She is born a queen by right divine. Her throne is stable as the everlasting hills; her sceptre powerful as the rod of Jove. Her throne is her husband's heart; her kingdom the household. There is her shrine there she sits in regal dignity...Let her be. Don't defile her, don't bring her down from her throne and cause her to lock horns with the bears and the bulls of men in the common walks of life. Don't think that her place is at the polls or in public affairs of life, but in the home (Seymour 1890).

As ministers, Ransom and Seymour were leaders of the A.M.E. Church and of the African-American community. Their stations also granted them membership to the ranks of the middle classes and they fully endorsed the gender ideology espoused in those classes, which they communicated in the pages of the longest-running African-American newspaper in the United States.

However, even if they had wanted to focus their lives around domestic tasks and their private households, most African-American women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could not have afforded to. Because they tended to occupy lower rungs on the socioeconomic ladder, women in free African-American families, like most women of color throughout American history, had to work to support their families. They had no other choice. Within this context, the act of working for wages became part of the act of mothering because it enabled children's very survival (Collins 1994:50).

Middle-class African-American women also rejected the notion that they should be confined to the home and stay out of work and politics. In 1868, a Philadelphia woman signing

herself “A Mother” wrote to the *Christian Recorder* to call women to go out into their communities and make a difference. On the other side of the (proverbial) street from the “colored” churches, she writes, “altars of sin and death are smoking with the victims of rum and licentiousness.” “Oh mothers,” she appeals:

is there nothing to be done for their little ones? What would our children be, if the first sounds that greeted their ears were the discords of wicked oaths; first sights that greeted their eyes, not the calm eyes of a holy motherhood leading them to the Lord, but earthly, sensual, bestial and brutal faces. OH! One of the saddest of earthly conditions, is to receive the boon of life in a sin-darkened, crime-overshadowed, Christless home; with no living mother to teach the untrained lips to call God our Father, to guide the feeble steps into the paths of wisdom and peace; no firm and judicious hand to hold the helm and rudder of a young life. “Do not new occasions teach new duties?” And if there were a time when we felt, that we [African Americans] were only loose hangers on of society, political outcasts and social Pariahs, let us remember that today we stand on the threshold of a new era, a race newly anointed with freedom, and if we would outgrow the old shards and shells of the past, and add our quota to the civilization of our country, one of the most important things we can do, is not to stand with hands folded in proud and idle seclusion, but to go to work earnestly, and battle against intemperance, vice, and degradation (*Christian Recorder* 1868).

This appeal chimes in with the cult of domesticity’s “holy motherhood” where feminine influence was paramount in shaping children’s morals, but it also extends beyond into the political and social realm well outside of the home with an appeal to political duty. Francis Harper’s popular story *Trial and Triumph*, which ran in the *Christian Recorder* 1888–1889, features a schoolteacher character, a Mrs. Lassett, whose turn toward teaching Harper explains this way: “After she became a wife and mother, instead of becoming entirely absorbed in a round of household cares and duties, and she often said, that the moment the crown of motherhood fell upon her how that she had poured a new interest in the welfare of her race. With these feelings she soon became known as a friend and helper in the community in which she lived” (Harper 1888). Harper offers Lassett as a role model for female influence who carried her domestic role as counsel beyond her own household to serve as an enabling guide when the character of Mr. Thomas runs up against public unwillingness to hire him as a black man to teach an integrated

school. In this way, the role models that African-American women leaders fashioned for themselves moved in circles beyond the narrow domesticity to which some of their male peers would confine them.

To conceptualize the unity of public and private spheres that characterized the lives of so many women of color, black sociologist and theorist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the work of mothering “goes beyond ensuring the survival of one’s own biological children or those of one’s family. This type of *motherwork* recognizes that individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment, and identity” (Collins 1994:47, emphasis added). Collins thus invites us to investigate the ways in which the personal and the collective, the public and the private, interpenetrated one another—a multiscale approach to family life and reproduction that encompasses the interpenetration of family life and work when parents take their children to work with them or bring work into the house so that childrearing and job training become intertwined and the parent-child relationship is tangled together with workplace relationships (Collins 1994:51), the extension of motherhood beyond one’s own biological children to nurturing the community as a whole and its other members as people form maternal relationships with relatives, neighbors, and friends who serve as “othermothers” (Collins 1994:56), and the dialectical struggle between raising children to navigate an unequal world and giving them the tools to dismantle that world (Collins 1994:57). The particular forms of motherwork at play in any community depend on the social and historical circumstances and on the capabilities of individuals. However, in all cases Collins’ concept of motherwork invites multiscale thinking about the relationships between individuals, families, and community. A major component of the three investigations that make up this study of family life in Easton’s free African-American community involves considerations of the interplay between individuals and their friends,

neighbors, and relatives as they navigated household structure, relationships, pregnancy, and child-rearing.

The two inquiries into family life in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African-American Easton that make up this section take up the question of personal and community interaction that motherwork delineates. These chapters are drawn from the three essential rights at the core of reproductive justice. In accordance with the right to bear children, I use census data from Easton from 1790 through the present to chart the trajectory of the community's demographics over time and conduct a statistical investigation into the social circumstances that affected family size and structure. Free African-American families worked toward reconstituting families that slavery had separated, forming bonds both at the nuclear family level and those that reached throughout extended-family networks while continuing to face above-average mortality rates, into the early twentieth century. These families also saw significantly higher child mortality rates than their white neighbors, a problem that persisted despite gains in parity in some other aspects of family life. In the nineteenth century, those children who survived were often apart from their families in their teenaged years due to obligatory apprenticeships or work. The right to keep and raise children leads to questions about childhood and childrearing in a discourse analysis of lessons geared toward young African-American boys and girls. To do this, I put the two most common types of toys recovered archaeologically from sites in Easton—marbles and tea sets—into dialogue with references to these toys in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers. Through these toys and stories about them, African-American parents and communities worked together to prepare boys for bravery and personal fortitude in an unequal world and to prepare girls to shoulder together the motherwork that would lie ahead for them and their roles as culture-bearers for their communities—gender roles that reflected to a



degree the white middle-class norms of American society but also were shaped by the particular needs of a people subject to personal and systemic racism. The right not to bear children calls for a closer look into the knowledge and activities of African-American midwives like Grace Brooks. However, it has not been possible to fully pursue this line of inquiry within the scope of this study and I mention it here to highlight the need for further scholarship. These historical and archaeological queries address different facets of the question of reproduction in African-American Easton at the individual, family, and community levels. Free African Americans may have escaped bondage, but they faced many of the same inequalities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in terms of their control over their families' and communities' futures as they do today. They navigated what opportunities were available to them as best they could and prepared their children to do likewise, while also maintaining community-level networks of support that made survival possible and brought African Americans together around the common goal of making a way for each generation to rise higher than the one before it.

## Chapter 1

### Population and Place: Building Family and Social Networks

Part of The Hill's significance derives from the fact that the African-American community centered in this neighborhood has survived, essentially in the same place, since the late eighteenth century. In order to sustain itself through time, on a very basic level, a community must reproduce itself down the generations and maintain its population. Census data reflect a rough understanding of the trajectory of this community and its place in Easton and Talbot County through tracking the free African-American population against other segments of the total population.<sup>3</sup> These same census data also provide the beginnings of a picture of the internal structure of the community as African Americans strove to create, in freedom, a family and broader social network that would support them. This record is fragmented by the available census data. However, it begins to become clear that African Americans in Easton often pursued nuclear family ideals and met the challenges that limited economic opportunities, poverty, and associated premature mortality posed to those goals with relationship strategies such as adoption, remarriage, and communal raising of children. These strategies fundamentally shaped the nature of social life among members of this community and helped to bring them together in pursuit of autonomy and the shared desire to be able to determine their own fates.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of census data sources and overall population breakdown by race for Talbot County and the Town of Easton from 1790 through 2010, including tabular data for Figure 1.1.

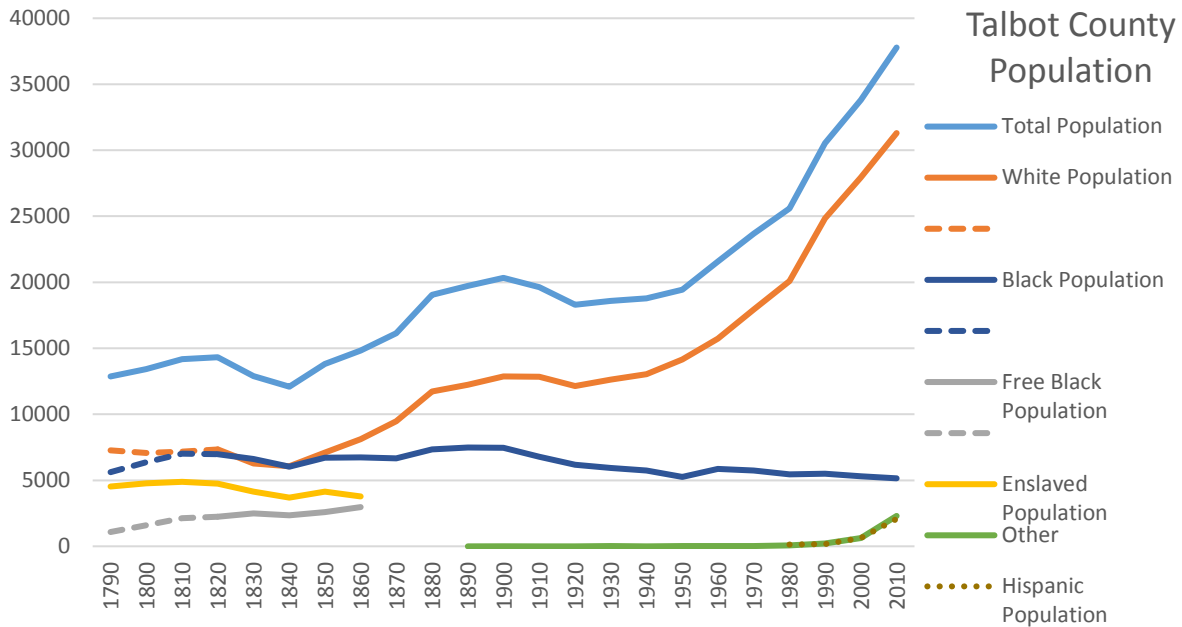
## Trajectory of the Community as a Whole

Following the free African-American population as a whole through time demonstrates Easton was a primary locale of opportunity for the free African-American population in Talbot County since at least 1820, when Easton first became identifiable in the census record, because the demographic trend in this town separates, substantially at times, from the trends at the county level—and does so in ways that are positive for the free African-American population. The free African-American population grew in Easton and throughout Talbot County in the federal and antebellum periods and the African-American population was much more stable and even grew in Easton through most of the twentieth century despite a steady numerical decline county-wide.

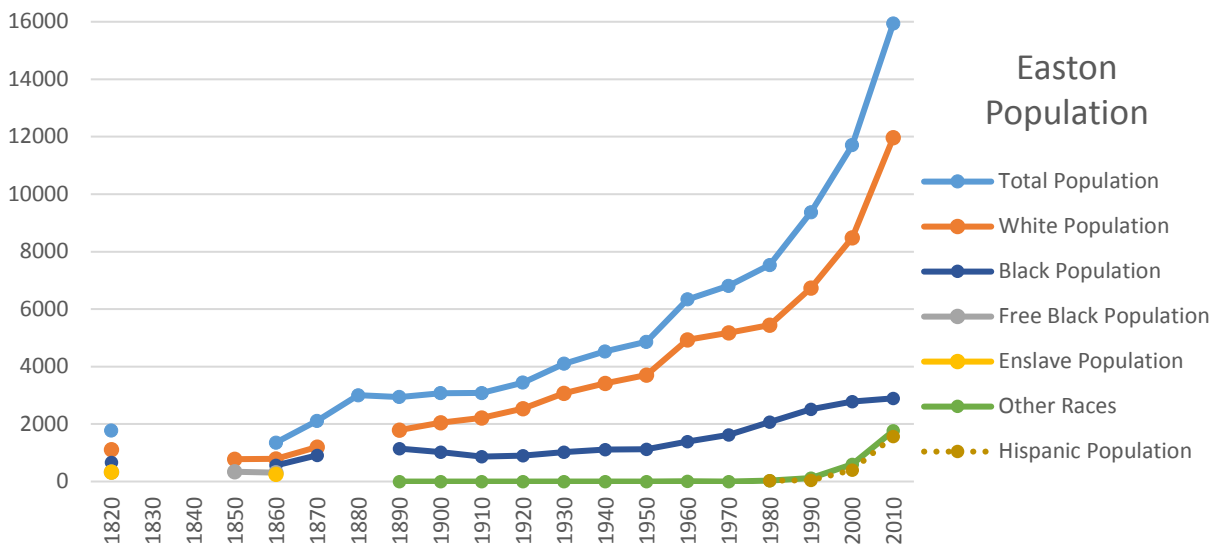
During the Federal period, the numbers of free African Americans grew rapidly in Talbot County. Indeed, the growth in Talbot County's overall population between 1790 and 1820 was mostly made up by the growth in the free "colored"<sup>4</sup> population. The white population, which accounted for the largest share of the county's residents, actually declined between 1790 and 1800 and grew marginally in the following two decades. The number of enslaved people remained fairly stable. Because Talbot County had no major urban center, it is likely that the growth in the free "colored" population during this period consisted mainly of enslaved county residents attaining their freedom. That the enslaved population did not decline in matching step with the rise in the free population suggests that slaveowners, as a group, made additional

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<sup>4</sup> When using the census records, I attempt for the most part to use the terms original to those records. Prior to 1850, the people we would today call African Americans are termed "colored." From 1850 to 1920, the census distinguishes within this group between black and mulatto people (USBC 2017). Where relevant, I use these terms. Mulattoes consistently appear almost entirely within and adjacent to the households of black people. It is therefore clear that mulatto and black people were, with scant exceptions, members of unified African-American communities. The writers of the statistical summaries for 1870–1920 also combined these two groups. When referring to the combined or general data for people of African descent, I use the modern term "African American" or, in some cases, "person of color" or "people of color."



a.



b.

**Figure 1.1:** Talbot County and Easton populations, 1790–2010. These population counts are derived from the U.S. census records, primarily from the annual summaries published by the federal government one to three years after the census was taken. Records are not available for all years for the Town of Easton. Dashed lines chart a. indicate the degree of uncertainty regarding the definition of the column in those years for “other free persons.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Once the census from 2000 onward allowed for multiple races, there is some overlap between the white and black counts such that the total of white, black, and other adds to more than the actual number of people. In 2000, there were 35 people of mixed white and black race. This overlap is miniscule and does not affect the overall trends. 2010 presents the same issue as 2000 with regard to multi-race individuals. However, here, there is no clarity as to how many black/white mixed people there are. There are 314 white people who also listed one or more other races;

purchases from outside the county. Indeed, one of the wealthiest planters in the county, Edward Lloyd IV, dramatically increased during his lifetime both the landholdings and the enslaved population that his family controlled (Russo 1992:78–79). Unfortunately, it is impossible to describe in the same way the demographic developments of early Easton because census records do not recognize the town as a distinguishable entity until 1820. However, the 1820 census makes clear that Easton served by that time as an enclave of opportunity for free African Americans. In that year, they made up 19% of the town’s residents. Throughout the rest of the county, they accounted for only 15%. The higher concentration of free African Americans in Easton reflects better opportunities for work, family, and social life. It is not surprising,

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there are 189 black people who did so. The overlap between those two numbers is not specified. Therefore, the numbers used for 2010 also contain overlap between the white and black populations. However, once again, this overlap makes up a tiny fraction of either population and does not change the overall trends.

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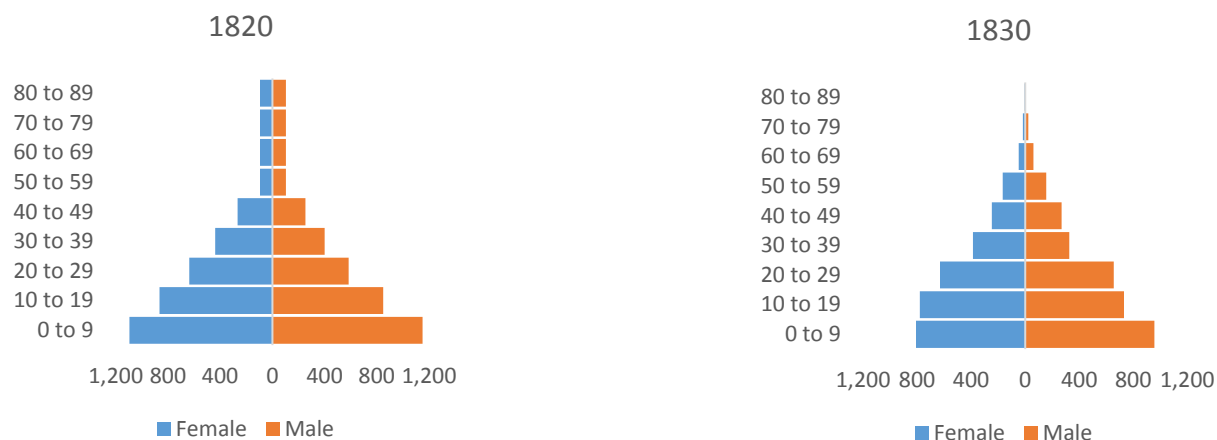
The Other lines in figures 1.1 and 1.2 represent those people who were neither white, nor African-American. The first recorded appearance of someone who was neither white, nor black, nor mulatto, in Easton took place in 1890, when one Chinese person was counted. The number of people in this category remained below 7 in Easton and below 14 county-wide until 1970. In 2000 and 2010, because of the recording of multiple races and some overlap between the white and black populations, the number of people who were neither black nor white was calculated by subtracting the number of white and the number of black people from the total population. In 2000, The number of mixed-race white and black people was denoted in the summary statistics available. Therefore, this number could be added once to the Other tally to correct for over-subtracting the overlap between the white and black populations in the calculation of the Other total. In 2010, the number of people in this category was not included in summary statistics and could not be accounted for in calculation of Other. Therefore, the number under Other for 2010 should be higher than it is reported here for both the Easton and Talbot County charts.

The line for the Hispanic population appears to track closely with the Other line. However, it is important to note that these categories, while they overlap significantly, do not count the same people. In 1990, 67% of the Hispanic population in Easton was counted as either white or black. In 2000, 44% of them were; in 2010, 46%. In Talbot County, these rates were 68%, 48%, and 47%, respectively. While these Hispanic people appear under the white or African-American totals, the Other category also includes numbers of non-Hispanic people who were neither white, nor black, including especially Asian residents.

therefore, that free people of color in this period established a cultural home in Easton that greatly shaped The Hill neighborhood as the town developed.

Between 1820 and 1860, the overall Talbot County population declined markedly and then recovered. The change in population most likely resulted from the series of financial and economic crises that wracked antebellum America. In assessing free African Americans' relationship to this decline, it is useful to compare their experience with that of their white and enslaved neighbors. The number of free African Americans appears to have been relatively unaffected by this dip, though the numbers for the total in that population probably mask a great deal of impact on individuals and families. The sharpest decline in the county's total occurred in the white population between 1820 and 1830. Determining where in the white population the decline took place is difficult because the 1820 and 1830 censuses use different age brackets to break down the white population. The 1830 census contains a more fine-grained distribution along decadal breaks. The age distribution of the white population in Talbot County in 1820 along these breaks may be calculated by dividing the number of people in each age cohort by the number of years in the cohort to approximate the number of people of every age by year and then adding these numbers together according to the 1830 age brackets, effectively shifting the population into the latter cohort groupings. This approximation is imperfect, particularly for individuals aged 50 to 90, where it skews the population toward older ages because of the averaging function of the initial interval control. However, as a rudimentary comparison, it becomes possible to track the decrease in each decadal cohort.

Almost all segments of the white population in Talbot County decreased in this decade. The greatest decrease took place in the youngest age cohort as people had fewer children. The



**Figure 1.2:** Talbot County’s white population in 1820 and 1830. The population in 1820 has been redistributed along the age cohort breaks that appeared in 1830 in order to facilitate comparison between the two decades. The resulting figures are a rough approximation of the population’s shape in 1820.

only definite increase took place among men in their 20s.<sup>6</sup> Overall, the white population decreased markedly. The white population in Talbot County also experienced the most rapid growth after the Civil War. Greater fluctuation in the white population suggests greater mobility in response to financial pressures. When times became hard, white folks could more easily pick up and move west or to cities looking for opportunities than could free people of color.

The enslaved population also declined during the 1820s and ‘30s before beginning to increase again in the 1840s, alongside the white population. While the white population bottomed out in 1830 and began a recovery, the enslaved population continued to decline for another decade before reaching its local minimum in 1840. The parallel trajectory between the white and enslaved black populations suggests that white slaveowners, facing economic uncertainty and budgetary tightness, either sold or freed large numbers of slaves. They continued to do so during the 1830s as they began to recover from the crash of the 1820s. The

<sup>6</sup> Based on the approximations from 1820, it would appear that increases took place among white men in their 40s and in both men and women in their 50s. However, the method of approximating 1830 age brackets for 1820 population numbers renders the 1820 counts in ages 40 and upward suspect and these increases most likely did not occur. The 12% increase in white males aged 20 to 29 is intriguing and invites further study.

manumission of slaves during this period probably contributed to the lack of decline in the total number of free people of color, which continued to grow slowly in the 1820s. This subtle growth in population among free people of color that the manumission of slaves made possible most likely masks a great deal of insecurity and stress among free black families in the antebellum period.

Not all slaves who disappeared from the Talbot County population during the 1820s and 1830s joined the county's free population. That the overall African-American population during both decades decreased demonstrates that many of these slaves left the county. This is particularly the case in the 1830s, when both the free and enslaved African-American populations declined. Some slaves may have been freed and moved to other places like Baltimore. In addition, people of color who were already free may have left the county or died and were not replaced with an equal number of manumitted slaves and new births. Presumably, the majority of slaves who were sold out of the area were sold to the Deep South.

However strong the overall numbers of the free African American population remained during the antebellum period, as reflected in the census, individuals, families, and institutions of the free African-American community in Easton were affected by the economic crises and general uncertainty and constriction of opportunity of the period. For example, Henny Freeman's descendants were unable to inherit her property in 1828 because the county took possession of it for taxes owed and sold it at auction (Schmidt 2016:17). In 1827, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church had to sell off most of the land its trustees had acquired in 1820. Two of the trustees, Joseph Chain and Perry Sprouse, bought the church lots to keep them under community control. However, Chain, once a successful merchant and barber, declared bankruptcy in 1830 and vanished from the historical record (Catherine Wilson, personal



communication March 11, 2013; Schmidt 2014). James Parrot, a white man, bought the lot on which the church stood and divided it into parcels to sell, at which point Bethel Church reclaimed only the immediate grounds surrounding the church building. Only 70 years later did the church finally manage to reassemble most of the original town lot 51, on which the church stood in 1827 (Schmidt 2014). Despite a seemingly large amount of flux among individuals, the free African-American population as a whole continued to look in 1830 and 1840 much as it did in 1820. The high fertility visible in each decade did not transform the population in a baby boom (see Figures 1.9, 1.10, and 1.11).

Census data on most of the antebellum period for Easton are, unfortunately, not available. Easton is unidentified in both the original records and the summary statistics for both 1830 and 1840 (USDS 1830b; USDS 1832:15; USDS 1840b; USDS 1841). However, the censuses of 1850 and 1860 do identify the town. In both these years, enslaved individuals were listed separately from the rest of the population in “slave schedules.” Of the two years, only the 1860 slave schedule identifies the town of Easton. It is therefore possible to assess Easton’s white and free African-American populations in both 1850 and 1860 but the enslaved and total populations only the latter of these two census years. Overall, the partial antebellum data for Easton indicate that the town shared in the demographic trends of the county as a whole. Between 1820 and the next available town-level total data in 1860, Easton’s overall population shrank by almost one quarter, averaging a 6.5% decrease per decade. The number of white people declined by almost 30% between 1820 and 1850. It remained almost unchanged a decade later. The significant decline in this largest demographic—and the one most affected county-wide as well by the population crash—suggests that Easton took longer to overcome the early antebellum population crash.

As throughout the county, the total number of free African Americans in the Town of Easton appears to have remained relatively unaffected by the economic woes of the period. In fact, it actually is 2% higher in 1850 than in 1820. However, such meager growth compared to the 15% increase county-wide indicates that Easton was not a major destination for free African Americans in the antebellum period. Without tracking individuals and families, it is unclear to what extent Easton's numerical stability reflects actual family stability or replacement.

The Civil War does not appear to have impacted the taking of the 1860 census in Talbot County. Although censuses often took months to complete and stretched into the following year, there are no anomalies in the white male age cohorts that would suggest soldiers mustering and marching off to fight. The census was therefore probably concluded before the war broke out in 1861 and the turmoil that ensued. It thus presents a picture of Talbot County as it was on the doorstep of the conflict. In the decade running up to the Civil War, Talbot County's white and free African-American populations grew markedly. The decrease in the enslaved population during this decade matches closely with the increase in the county's free black population, suggesting that most of the changes to these two populations came from manumissions and that most manumitted slaves stayed within Talbot County. A sharp uptick in manumissions on the eve of the conflict that would tear apart not only the country, but Talbot County itself, from which residents went to serve on both sides (Campbell 2016), is a rather interesting situation. It suggests fairly strong abolitionist sentiment in the county. However, many Talbot County residents supported the confederacy, including state legislature representative J. Lawrence Jones, who was arrested in September 1861, along with other members of the legislature, for disloyalty to the Union (*New York Times* 1861). Yet, far more whites fought for the Union (Campbell

2016). As opportunities to serve became available to them, Talbot County furnished more than 400 free and formerly enslaved men of color to the Union war effort (Mitchell:410).

In Easton, in the run-up to the 1860 census, Easton's population declined slightly. The size and makeup of the white population remained virtually unchanged. While the county-wide free African-American population rose substantially, that same population in Easton declined by 9%. Easton was not, it would seem, the destination of choice for newly freed people. Something must have been going on in the town that was negative for the free black community there. Or perhaps Baltimore was simply more appealing.

Both Talbot County's and Easton's populations grew during the 1860s. In the county as a whole, the white population alone accounted for this growth, while the African-American population remained stable. In Easton, however, both populations grew at approximately the same rate. The difference in trend between the African-American populations on the town and county scales suggests movement by newly freed African Americans within Talbot and the urbanization of the county's African-American population. Postwar economic growth fueled by the railroad's arrival in 1869 (Scharf 1888:430) offered opportunity and freed slaves swelled the numbers of free black folks already living on The Hill. If the number of slaves in Easton in 1860 were merely added to the free population, that number would only reach half the number of African Americans living in Easton in 1870. Therefore, additional influx of freed slaves made up a significant contribution to the population growth that the community experienced. The influx of newcomers, most of them younger (see Figures 1.11 and 1.16), into Easton's African-American population, all of whom were now free, would have brought new vibrancy to the community, its youth and energy matching the investments in the built environment from this post-war period. Many of the neighborhood's houses today, and indeed much of the architecture

in Easton as a whole, dates from the postbellum period. The growth in Easton's African-American community in the 1860s probably prompted the construction of the new, brick buildings at Asbury and Bethel Churches, which were completed the following decade.

Both the county and town populations continued to grow rapidly throughout the late nineteenth century. Talbot County's growth rate reached an all-time peak in 1880, mostly due to increases in the white population. However, the African-American population also grew during this decade at a rate that would only be surpassed almost a century later. Easton, too, grew rapidly during the 1870s. Its growth then stalled from 1880 to about 1910 before recommencing a long period of growth. It is not possible to tell with certainty in what quarters the town's 1870s growth lay, due to a gap in racial breakdowns at the 1880 census. However, when examining the trends on either side of the gap, the white population appears to have made steady increases while the African-American population stalled and then began a decline that accounted largely for the pause in Easton's overall growth. The town's African-American population peaked at 1143 in 1890 before declining by 24% over the next twenty years.

The twentieth century observed a gradual and steady decline in Talbot County's African-American population, which peaked in 1890 and has never since recovered. The decline only reversed briefly in the 1960s and paused in the 1980s before resuming on both occasions. Meanwhile, the county's white population also declined until 1920, at which point it resumed steady growth. During the 1900s and 1920s, the white population decreased at a lower rate than did the African-American population and retained the superiority in size that it had amassed in the latter nineteenth century. The circumstances that caused the overall decline in Talbot County's population over two decades, therefore, were felt throughout the population. However, they hit African Americans harder and in a more sustained way. This disparity most likely arises

from racial inequality of opportunity and from the increased mobility, due to the end of slavery, of the black population as compared to the earlier population dip in the antebellum period.

While the rural parts of the county experienced significant decline in the early part of the twentieth century, Easton was insulated from the downturn and experienced it more as a pause in growth. White Eastoners appear hardly affected at all. Indeed, their population growth rate barely changed from 1890 through 1950. As throughout the rest of the county, Easton's African-American population peaked in 1890. Within a generation, they lost nearly one quarter of their number, falling to 872 in 1910. It is significant that the 1860s boom in Easton's African-American population ebbed and turned to steep decline during a period in which racial segregation came to characterize the town's geography (See Figure 1.5). Economic woes affecting the whole county around the turn of the twentieth century may well have exacerbated racial tensions. In Easton, the rate of decrease in the African-American population during the first decade of the 1900s exceeded the county average by 50%. African Americans living in town, therefore, where they could not grow their own food and were in other ways reliant on the availability of work and the affordability of rents, were more susceptible to hardship than those living in the rural parts of the county.

It was not possible in the scope of this project to transcribe large amounts of census data. However, the 1910 returns for the town of Easton offer the beginnings of a picture of what this decline in the African-American population looked like. The birth rate among African Americans in this year, 17 births out of a population of almost 900, was incapable of replacing the population. With the overall African-American population in the county also decreasing, Easton does not appear to have attracted enough of those leaving the rural parts of Talbot County to stem its own decrease. The large numbers of women and men in their teens and twenties

suggests that there was some migration into Easton by working-age adults. It is unlikely that these large numbers are residual from a baby boom ten to twenty years earlier because, although detailed data are not readily available, the African-American population was already in decline during that period. These incoming migrants bolstered the population under 20 considerably, such that the overall trajectory of the younger part of the population is toward a positive increase, rather than the decline by mortality that the nineteenth-century numbers by age demonstrate (See Figures 1.11 and 1.12).

The influx of these younger families, along with teenagers and young adults now staying in Easton rather than leaving, stemmed the population decline and turned around the trajectory of Easton's African-American community. It began to grow slowly in the 1910s and continued to grow over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In comparison, the white population in 1910 also experienced immigration around 1910. This is indicated by a positive slope in the trend in number of children under age 20 (See Figure 1.12). However, the white population appears to have experienced less immigration to Easton because its trend is flatter. The increase in the white population therefore came more from natural increase than from migration.

While Talbot County's African-American population continued to decline throughout most of the remainder of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, in Easton, it grew slowly from 1910 onward. In the 1960s, the growth rate of Easton's African-American population, as a percentage of its size, actually surpassed the growth rate of the town's white population, far exceeding it until 1990. Twentieth-century Easton, therefore, likely offered significantly greater opportunity for African Americans than the rest of Talbot County. Migration into Easton and the town's reversal of the overall county trend led to an urbanization

of Talbot's African-American population and its community life in the twentieth century beyond even the privileged position the town had played in the previous century.

From 1980 to the present, although the size of the African-American population in Easton has continued to grow, the rate of its growth has steadily declined. By the 2010s, it approached zero and the upcoming 2020 census may show growth to have ceased. This change comes amid rapid, exponential growth in the town's white population and in the numbers of Easton residents who are neither white, nor black. This other group includes mainly the rapidly expanding Hispanic community, which exploded from 31 in Easton and 133 in Talbot County in 1980 to 1570 in Easton and 2073 in the county in 2010.<sup>7</sup> Most of the Hispanic population's growth in

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<sup>7</sup> Changes in the data that the censuses include complicates an assessment of race and its comparison with ethnic Hispanic background. Although the vast majority of Hispanic residents in Easton and Talbot County are socially and culturally distinct from their white and African-American neighbors, there is no way to obtain an accurate differentiation between the numbers of these three groups from the census because the census treats Hispanic identity as an ethnic moniker separate from racial identity and intersecting with it. The 1980 census was the first to identify Hispanic ethnicity and marks it as a category separate from race, noting that "persons of Spanish origin may be of any race" (USBC 1982:162). The number of Hispanics has therefore overlapped with the counts of white and black residents since the beginning of its use. The 1990 census first specified the intersection of race and Hispanic ethnicity. In this year, of 46 Hispanic people in Easton (USBC 1990:21), the majority, 25, were white and 6 were black. The remaining 15 Hispanic people were listed as of other race. None of the 15 American Indians, Eskimo, or Aleut and none of the 43 Asians or Pacific Islanders were listed as Hispanic. The county reflected a similar makeup (USBC 1990:13). In 2000, the situation becomes more complicated with the census' recognition of multiracial identity, also overlapping in complex ways with Hispanic ethnicity. The summary statistics do not list out the full range of possible combinations. In this year, there were 404 people of Hispanic background in Easton. 157 were only white and Hispanic. 19 were only black and Hispanic. 200 had a single race that was neither white nor black and accounted for approximately half of the census' accounting of people who were neither white nor black. 200 had a single race that was neither white nor black and accounted for approximately half of the census' accounting of people who were neither white nor black. 28 were of mixed, and unknown, race. The county numbers were again similar. In both 2000 and 2010, therefore, a significant number of the Hispanic population appears under either the white or black populations. However, it is not possible to accurately extract their number and install them in a separate Hispanic category because of the lack of data points on people of mixed race. It would be possible to extract the Hispanic numbers from the white and black populations in 1990. However, it would not in 1980 because the precise races of Hispanic people were not noted in the summary statistics. Therefore, the growth of the Hispanic population must be assessed against changes in the white and black populations with the knowledge that there is some overlap between the populations. The numbers for the white and black populations in 1980–2010 should, realistically, be lower than they are when accounting for the portions of the Hispanic community that they contain. This is true particularly of the white population. However, the overlap affects neither the overall trends of any population, nor accounts for a noticeable amount of the African-American population.

The one place in which it does affect a trend is that, when the Hispanic black population is subtracted from the black population at the county level in 2010, the rate of decline in the county black population in the 2000s (to 2010) is greater than the rate of decline the 1990s (to 2000). When it is not subtracted, the rate of decline is smaller. Realistically, the black Hispanic population should be subtracted from the African-American population—although

Talbot County has centered on Easton, where 76% of Hispanic county residents lived in 2010. Within the town, the majority of Hispanic residents live on The Hill, as archaeologists discovered while handing out flyers for a public event in 2017. In much of The Hill, Hispanic residents are displacing African-American residents. Other parts of the neighborhood have instead seen white residents replace African-American residents. When describing Bethel Church's unsuccessful attempt to buy a house next-door to it, Oliver Holmes (oral history interview, 2014) expressed disappointment and powerlessness in the face of this kind of change: "This church wanted to buy that house right next to the church...that was owned by blacks. ...It was sold to whites. Never got a chance. Never was even given an offer—been able to give an offer for it. That's...the way some of our people do..." There has therefore been insufficient buy-in even within the African-American community to the importance of maintaining community geographic integrity, with the presence of other more lucrative offers from white buyers of African-American homes. Many of these new owners have less incentive to rent to African-Americans from The Hill and can get more rent from Hispanic immigrants. Resident Nellie Sullivan despaired in a (2014) oral history interview about the recent rise in homelessness and the rising costs of living in this neighborhood that was once "for blacks": "And you rent from these landlords that's slumlord landlords...but they rent to them foreigners and you got

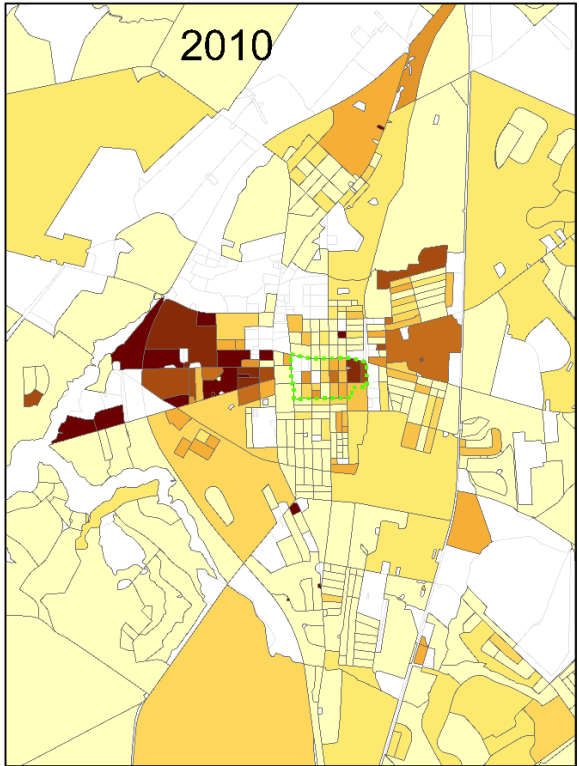
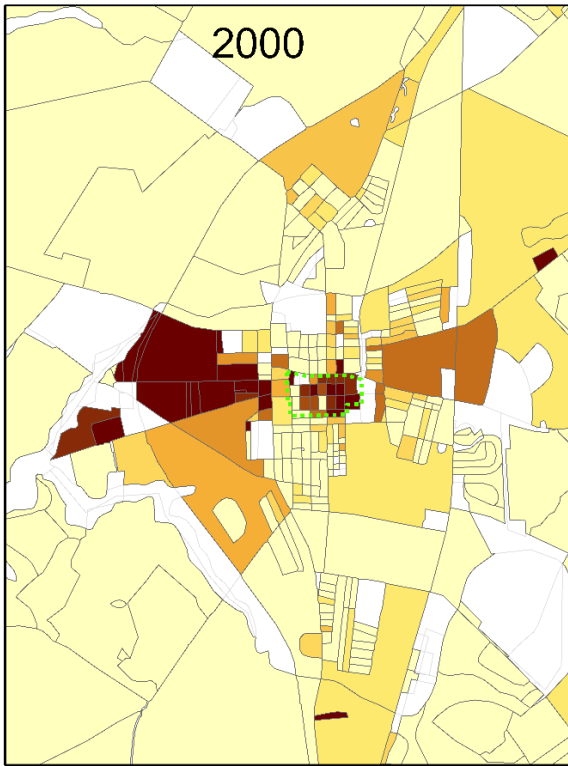
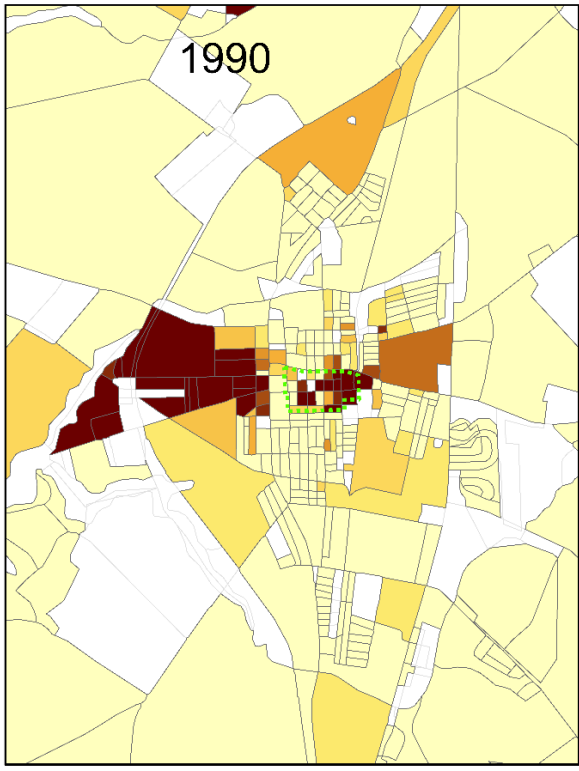
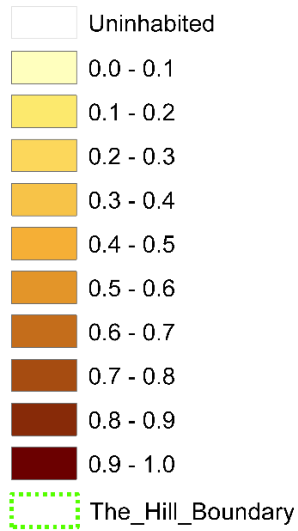
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there are a few individuals who are truly members of both communities, one of whom worked with the archaeological project—and therefore the trend should show an increasing rate of decline in the county African-American population.

The Hispanic population, in 2000 and 2010, does constitute a significant portion of the Other population, which is made up of those who are neither black, nor white. However, the exact proportion cannot be determined. Data on Hispanic race is unavailable for 1980. In 1990, 15 Hispanic people in Easton were neither white, nor black. In 2000, this number grew to 199 and by 2010 it had grown further still to 780. None of these numbers include Hispanic people who were of mixed race that included neither white nor black ancestry. By this year, Hispanic people who were neither white, nor black, made up a majority of the Easton's residents who were neither white, nor black.

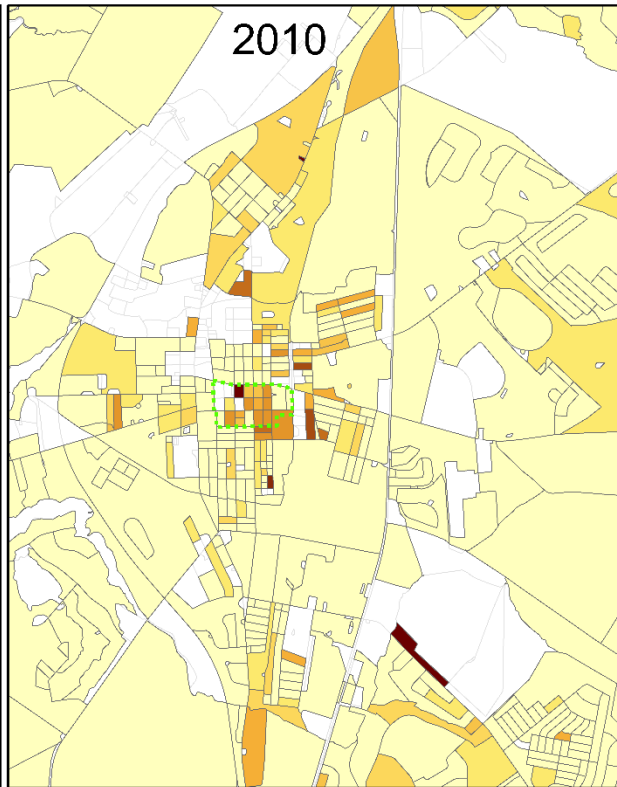
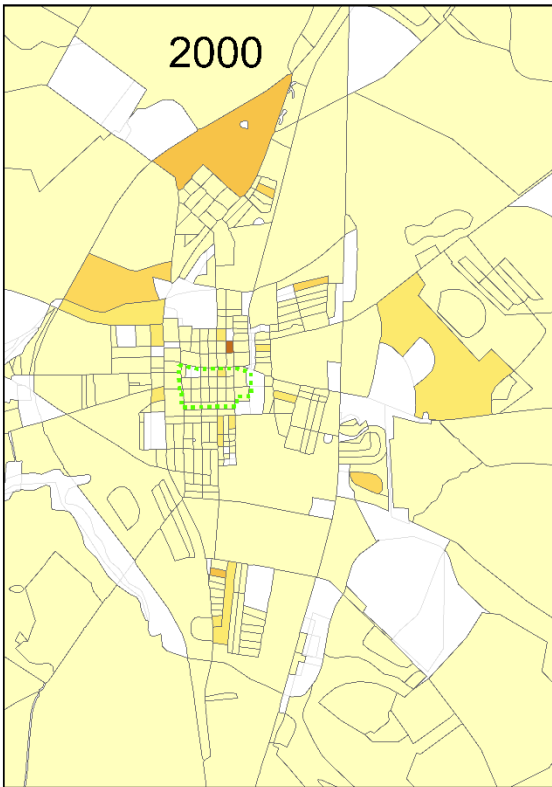
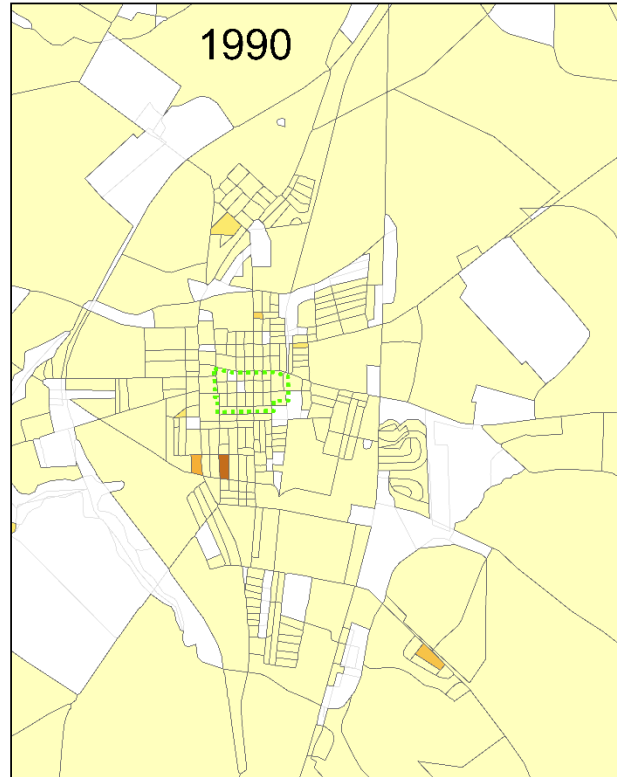
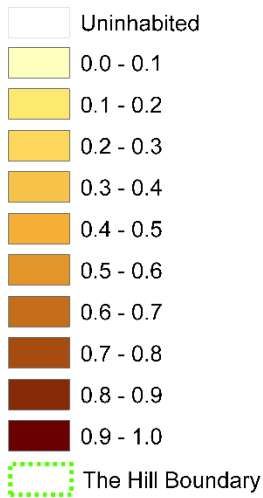


**African-American Residents  
as Percentage  
of Total Population,  
by Census Block**



**Figure 1.3:** Shifts in the geographic distribution of Easton’s African-American population in recent decades. The density of African-American residence on The Hill and, to a lesser extent, in The Bottom, to the west, has decreased.

# Hispanic Residents as Percentage of Total Population, by Census Block



**Figure 1.4:** Shifts in the geographic distribution of Easton’s Hispanic population in recent decades. The sizeable influx of Hispanic residents has been densest on and around The Hill and in various other places around Easton.

three and four families livin' in there that can afford to pay them a thousand som'in dollars. And you—we—we—we can't afford to pay that for no rent!"

This displacement has led to social friction, particularly between the African-American and Hispanic communities. In 2016, an older black male resident recounted to me his suspicions that Hispanic children were stealing milk from the elementary school for their parents to sell in their store, the gas station convenience store that stands on the northern edge of The Hill at the intersection of Dover Street and Locust Lane. Although this story seems unlikely to be true, such a conspiracy theory may be a symptom of the changing neighborhood. Nevertheless, some relations between the African-American and Hispanic communities have been quite positive and Asbury Church has welcomed a Hispanic congregation that meets there on Saturdays, which both provides a home for the new congregation and distributes the burden of caring for the aging building in the context of falling attendance in the African-American congregation at the church. The children of both congregations' ministers even married (Lucy and Richard Molock, oral history interview 2014). Nevertheless, there is a pervasive benign disconnect between both groups: "You see where I'm livin' in now—'cause I'm getting' foreigners in there now. But they don't bother you. Only problem with 'em: I don't know what they're saying. So they could call me a nigger I still don't know what they're saying" (Nellie Sullivan, oral history interview 2014).

As latter-twentieth-century economic development bypassed The Hill and the working-class African-American neighborhood of The Bottom along Port Street on the western side of town, the trajectory of Easton's African-American population into the future comes to resemble the long and gradual decrease in the black population county-wide. This changing direction of growth in Easton's black population amidst rapid and intensifying increase in every other

demographic signifies the failure in the twenty-first century of The Hill to offer African Americans the same levels of opportunity that it did in the nineteenth century and the middle part of the twentieth.

### Family Structure

Looking more closely at the demographic structure of the free African-American population in Easton and in Talbot County, more broadly, further characterizes the successful struggle that generations made to climb out of bondage and limitation and to make a place for themselves. Antebellum free households of color tended to be smaller than the Talbot County average but approached parity with white households by the early twentieth century. Free African Americans frequently tended toward a nuclear model of family structure, though they also formed other sorts of families, including female-headed households, built around blood rather than marriage. In all sorts of arrangements, households faced difficulty staying together. Free African Americans tended to marry later in life and were more likely to lose a spouse at an early age, leaving fewer adults to raise children. In answer to these challenges, they compensated by building more intergenerational households, households headed by women, remarrying, and adopting children. While women continued to take the central role in raising children, they tapped community networks to provide the support they needed when the resources of their own households came up short. Census statistics illustrate these individual, family, and community experiences, which begin to paint the picture of the collective reproductive decisions and realities that African Americans experienced in Easton and its environs from the nineteenth century into the early twentieth. Many of the trends that emerged

in the antebellum period continued into the twentieth century, continuing to shape the lives of later generations.

Because of issues relating to the sourcing of data, statistics on family structure are limited in many places to 1790–1830 for Talbot County and 1820, 1870, and 1910 for Easton. Statistics for Talbot County in 1790 are based on the GenWeb transcript (USDS 1790b) corrected against the original scans (USDS 1790a). My analysis excludes entries for John Brown and Tristram Bowdle because these entries were damaged on the original records and the data for the households are incomplete. For Talbot County from 1800 through 1820 and also for Easton in 1820, statistics are based on GenWeb transcripts (USDS 1800; USDS 1810; USDS 1820). The total population and the totals by race and status do not match those given in the summary statistics documents for these years, meaning that there are most likely transcription errors. It has not been possible within the scope of this project to check each data point in each census. Therefore, I advance tentatively the statistics for these years.

The Talbot County census for 1830 has household totals in the transcript (USDS 1830a). Therefore, I was able to check this source against the calculated total from the number in each column as a way of checking the transcription. There are a number of errors. In some cases, the entry was put in the wrong row; this will not affect the aggregate statistics on individuals by sex, race, status, and age. Other errors include missing, stray, and incorrect numbers entered. I have corrected where the household totals indicate errors, using original scans (USDS 1830b). I have not checked the whole document line by line and row by row. The totals by status are similar to those in the summary document (USDS 1832), though not exactly the same, so this transcript appears fairly trustworthy.

The GenWeb transcript for 1840 (USDS 1840b) is incomplete. Beginning on page 37, the GenWeb transcriber recorded only the entries on the front side of the page and not those on the reverse. All African-American residents were recorded on the reverse of the census pages, so this omission deletes all data on African-American residents for the affected pages, which make up more than one third of the record for Talbot County. Completing and checking the transcript is too large a task for this project. Therefore, I have not used the 1840 census for demographic analysis.

1850 marks the first year in which the census lists people individually, rather than by household, and includes precise ages. However, in 1850 and 1860, the census recorded enslaved African-Americans on a separate slave schedule from the main population schedule where white and free African-American residents appear. Because the census listed enslaved men, women, and children according to the name of their owner, rather than the name of the head of the household in which they resided, and because analysis below of records for other years indicates that many enslaved people lived in households other than their owners', it is not possible to assign this large component of the county population to their correct households. Therefore, any analysis of household size and structure for 1850 and 1860 would have to rely solely on the population schedule and would be necessarily incomplete and inaccurate. In the analyses that follow that are based on households, I have not included data for 1850 or 1860. I have, however, used these censuses to graph age and sex profiles of the population as a whole (USDI 1850a; USDI 1860a).

After the census for 1860, there are no complete, readily available transcripts. Web-based genealogy service FamilySearch provides partial transcripts along with original records. I have extracted, formatted, and transcribed additional essential data columns for the town of

Easton for 1870 (USDI 1870) and 1910 (USBC 1910) in order to provide some reference for demographic trajectories into the early twentieth century. However, full transcription of the entire county and for more decades was not possible. I have made some corrections to the transcripts, using the scans of the original records, where errors have become apparent in the course of analyzing the data. In 1910, because the jail, hospital, and a nursing school are identifiable in the census for this year, they are not included in statistics that use the household as the basis of measurement. The 1910 census is the first one available for this analysis that specifies the kinship, employment, and boarding relationships among household members. It therefore affords a more thorough analysis and plays a larger role in my analysis.

Because of transcription issues—errors in 1800–1830 and incompleteness in 1840—I offer the demographic analyses that follow in this section tentatively with the understanding that future correction of transcription errors may paint a somewhat different picture of life in Talbot County, and Easton specifically, for free people of color and also of the impact of demographic realities and family social structures on reproductive concerns.

### *Race and freedom in household structure*

Despite the boundaries that the institution of slavery created between family members and friends who were enslaved and those who were free, some free and enslaved African Americans were able to live together, independent from white people. However, she was far from the only slave who attained this kind of freedom. In 1820, eight households in Easton were made up of both free and enslaved people of color and only by them (USDS 1820). Some of these were small domestic pairs like that of Betsy Danbury, who lived with an enslaved man of

approximately her same age, most likely her husband. Others of these mixed households were families. Matilda Cornish, who was free, lived with a slightly older enslaved man and with a young enslaved girl and one young free girl. Possibly, Matilda and her husband were in the process of escaping slavery and she had given birth to one daughter before attaining her own freedom and one after, leading to one daughter's being free and the other enslaved. African-American families on the Eastern Shore at that time sometimes made such arrangements (Dorsey 2011:69). Susan, or "Suky," Bailey managed to gain her freedom by 1800 and her household included 11 members (USDS 1800:76B). She appears again in 1820 in Easton, listed by her full name of Susan. Her household of eight at that point included one enslaved child, possibly a grandchild who was allowed to live among free relations and friends and to grow up outside of direct control by slaveowners (USDS 1820:9b). Through these various arrangements, enslaved people were able to live with free family members and friends.<sup>8</sup>

Some free people of color in more rural outlying areas also lived among enslaved households on Talbot County's farms and plantations. If at least some slave quarters may be identified in the census as households with no white people present and where enslaved household members made up a majority of the household, then the 1790 household of Isaac Brooks was one such example, where one free person of color lived with seven enslaved people (USDS 1790a). In 1800, the two largest non-white households were made up of majority enslaved members but also included four and one free people of color, respectively (USDS

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<sup>8</sup> In some cases, African Americans purchased their family members but did not manumit them, at least not immediately (Frazier 1939:178–179). This would result in mixed free/enslaved households where quite a distinct power dynamic held sway. These households thus operated differently from both entirely free households and those where one or more members were enslaved by someone outside the household. African Americans in some places owned slaves outright and behaved toward them as white slaveowners did. However, this was more common in the deeper South where free people of mixed African and European heritage formed a distinct caste (Meyers 2011:11). It may not be that all cases in which enslaved people appear within households headed by free African Americans and exclusive of white people were living there with permission of a white owner. However, this did occur in certain cases.



1800b:72B,85B). In 1820, at least one quarter, identified by the name of overseer John Ayres as head of household, included eight enslaved members and four free people of color (USDS 1820:9A). Living in quarters was convenient for free people of color working in the agricultural sector, sometimes for the same men and women who had previously held them in bondage (Dorsey 2011:24–31). It also provided a solution in cases where the master would not consent to enslaved family members living with their free relations.

There is no clear trend over time in the proportion of Talbot or Easton population living in mixed-status African-American-only households. The percentages of free African Americans living in nonwhite households with enslaved household members fluctuates between 0 and 10% over the federal and antebellum periods. The households that people maintained under these circumstances would therefore appear to be structured mainly by the immediate concerns and opportunities of individuals, based on personal relationships among African-American friends and family and between African-Americans and the slave-owners who allowed such living arrangements. Whether enslaved people living with free family and friends or the other way round, these independent, African-American mixed-status households defied the boundaries that slavery presented to family and community integrity. It is clear from the small but consistently present number of slaves who were able to live on their own or with free relations that at least some slaveowners recognized the humanity of those they held in bondage—or at least perceived this degree of independence and close interaction with free people of color not to be a threat to their authority and property claims over these enslaved individuals.

Some free African Americans also lived in thoroughly mixed households that included both enslaved African Americans and white people. Most of these households included no more than three free people of color and the largest number of these households included only one.

Therefore, most of the free people of color living in such arrangements did so as individuals or partial family units. Some may have simply lived with employers, while others sought family integrity even if it meant having to live within white-headed households. They sacrificed independence for the ability to live with their relations.

In *Hirelings*, Dorsey suggests that the proportion of free people of color living in mixed households decreased over time, meaning that free African Americans preferred to live independently of white people and gradually managed to extract themselves from white-headed households. Using census data from Queen Anne's County, Maryland, and Loudoun County, Virginia, she demonstrates decreases in the percent of white households that included both free and enslaved black people, from 25% in 1810 to 10% in 1820 in Queen Anne and from 31% in 1810 to 18% in 1830 in Loudoun (Dorsey 2011:73, in part citing Stevenson 1996:303). Dorsey interprets this shift toward black-only households as a testimony to "free African Americans' unwillingness to reside on slaveholders' plantations even to be near their enslaved loved ones" and an effort to move families onto footing independent from whites (Dorsey 2011:73). Indeed, Essah's (1996:132) state-wide data on Delaware show a consistent trend toward nonwhite households among the free African-American residents of the state in the antebellum period. However, when taking the full chronological span of Stevenson's original numbers for Loudoun County, Virginia, into account, such a trend is much less consistent. Stevenson tracks the percentage of free African Americans living in Loudoun's white households from 31% in 1810 to 18% in 1830—but back up to 37% in 1850 (Stevenson 1996:303). Dorsey's focus was on the federal period, leading her to overlook the later antebellum statistics. Therefore, the picture of free people of color living within multiracial households is somewhat more complicated than the one Dorsey paints.

Stevenson offers a much more basic interpretation of the early decline, which she attributes merely to the growth in number of free African Americans; the increase she attributes to hostility and economic repression experienced by free African Americans: “The following two decades, however, marred by increasing hostility reflected in free black economic, legal and social repression, witnessed a remarkable increase in the numbers who were inhabitants of white households” (Stevenson 1996:303). She does, however, agree with Dorsey’s notion that free African Americans preferred to live out from under the auspices of slaveowners because they often found themselves treated like slaves when living with slaveowners and family life was generally easier to achieve when not living on someone’s plantation (Stevenson 1996:304). Stevenson also reminds us that some few white people lived in households headed by free African Americans, “as either family members, boarders, or laborers” (1996:304). Therefore, although most multiracial households involved free and enslaved people of color living under white heads of household, it is important not to conflate statistics for free people of color living in the same households as white people with free people of color living in white households. Until 1850, the race of the householder is unclear from the census alone. Conflicting trends and interpretations when comparing Dorsey’s limited assessment of Queen Anne County with household circumstances elsewhere in the Upper South invite a deeper look into the race and status compositions of Talbot County households.

As far as Talbot County is concerned, the percentage of free people of color living in households that also include one or more white people dropped 13 points from 1790 to 1800 but then steadily rose through 1860 to almost its initial level. Inconsistent statistical trends between different locales and a fair degree of inconsistency in Loudoun County comparative data suggest that choice likely played a smaller role in determining whether free people of color lived in

**Table 1.1: Distribution of Free African-American Population in Talbot County by Household Type**

Year	Free Af-Am Population	Free Af-Am and White <sup>9</sup>	%	Mixed Households	%	Nonwhite Households	%	Free Af-Am and Enslaved	%
1790	1082	197	<b>18</b>	209	<b>19</b>	676	<b>62</b>	42	<b>4</b>
1800	1615	162	<b>10</b>	230	<b>14</b>	1223	<b>76</b>	162	<b>10</b>
1810 <sup>10</sup>	2133	774	<b>36</b>	1359	<b>64</b>	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>0</b>
1820	2239	260	<b>12</b>	322	<b>14</b>	1657	<b>74</b>	105	<b>5</b>
1830	2491	238	<b>10</b>	438	<b>18</b>	1815	<b>73</b>	190	<b>8</b>
1840	This transcript is incomplete								
Year <sup>11</sup>	Free Af-Am Population	Free African-American and White	%		Nonwhite Households	%			
1850	2580	764	<b>30</b>		1816	<b>70</b>			
1860	2968	937	<b>32</b>		2031	<b>68</b>			

This table presents the distribution of the free African-American population according to the combination of household members by race and status: free white, enslaved African American, and free African American. It includes both the number of free people of color living in each type of household and the percentage that they make up of the total free “colored” population. Data are for Talbot County unless designated as pertaining only to Easton. “Free African-American and White” households include those with only members of these two categories. Mixed households include members of all three. Nonwhite households include both those comprised of only free people of color and also those comprised of both, and only, free and enslaved people of color. This latter household type is also displayed in the last columns for reference on its own.

multiracial or nonwhite households than Dorsey claims. Because the rapid shift toward racially independent households coincided roughly with the federal-period rapid growth in the free African-American population demonstrated earlier, Stevenson’s argument that rising population contributed mainly to the growth of independent households appears to hold more weight.

Although free people of color may well have preferred to run their own households rather than live under white roofs, since a large majority did live independently of white people, they do not

<sup>9</sup> It is probably best here not to try to differentiate between households headed by white members and those headed by free household-members of color because the census does not clearly identify which household member is the head of household until 1850.

<sup>10</sup> In 1810, the census listed no free African Americans living outside of households with white people. The only non-white households were those made up solely by enslaved African Americans. Therefore, the detailed data for this year present an outlier to all trends and any emphasis on analyses of the 1810 census seems suspect.

<sup>11</sup> For 1850 and 1860, it is possible to assess the proportions of free African Americans living in multi- and single-race households based on the population schedules. However, because the data from the slave schedules cannot be matched to the households in the population schedules, it is not possible to further subdivide these two categories according to the presence or absence of enslaved individuals.

**Table 1.2: Distribution of Free African-American Population in Easton by Household Type**

Year	Free Af-Am Population	Free Af-Am and White <sup>12</sup>	%	Mixed Households	%	Nonwhite Households	%	Free Af-Am and Enslaved	%
1820	336	49	15	29	9	258	77	23	7
Year <sup>13</sup>	Free Af-Am Population	Free African-American and White		%	Nonwhite Households		%		
1870	911	218		24	693		76		
1910	886	18		2	879		98		

In Easton, free African Americans experienced somewhat higher rates of independent living than county-wide, especially by the early twentieth century.

appear in Talbot to have managed to alter this aspect of the residential landscape in a sustained way.

In Easton, both before and after the Civil War, the rates at which free people of color lived independently of white people closely resembled those county-wide. Here, the rate of independent living was slightly greater than it was throughout the rest of the county, marking the greater freedom that living in a semi-urban environment, where one was more likely to walk to work at another person’s establishment or house and less likely to live with an employer, provided. The end of slavery brought no sudden change in the rate of independent living for free African Americans. Although the end of bondage enabled family members to work toward reconstituting their family relationships within households by moving to be with one another, they appear to have done so without regard to whether it meant living with white people. Over the course of the ensuing 40 years between 1870 and 1910, however, these multiracial households almost completely disappeared in Easton and the proportion of African Americans living in households that also included white people plummeted. The domestic integration of the

<sup>12</sup> It is probably best here not to try to differentiate white-headed and free-African-American-headed households because the census does not clearly identify which household member is the head of household until 1850. Therefore, the total composition of the household is a more identifiable metric.

<sup>13</sup> For 1850 and 1860, it is possible to assess the proportions of free African Americans living in multi- and single-race households based on the population schedules. However, because the data from the slave schedules cannot be matched to the households in the population schedules, it is not possible to further subdivide these two categories according to the presence or absence of enslaved individuals.

nineteenth century was replaced by rigid residential segregation both inside households and at the neighborhood level.

Segregation took hold in various ways throughout the South in the 1880s and 1890s (Woodward 2002:33–34; Cole and Ring 2012). In Easton, it becomes clearly visible in 1910, when the federal census included full street addresses in Easton for the first time.<sup>14</sup> Early African-American residents of Easton in the federal and antebellum periods had lived in various places throughout town. While greater numbers of them had lived along eastern Dover Street

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<sup>14</sup> The 1910 federal census records for Easton include full street addresses for some houses and the name of the street on which the house was situated for the remainder of the households that they list. The 1900 census also includes street names, but does not list street numbers, even though a column on the form made that option available to the census-taker. The census-taker in 1910 again left most house numbers blank. However, some houses are listed by street number. In some cases, several consecutive households bear street numbers. In other cases, one or a few nonconsecutive houses on a particular street are numbered. While the record is incomplete, it is enough to reconstruct a partial picture of the town's social geography.

In order to locate census households spatially, it is necessary to match the street addresses with those on historic maps. The Sanborn fire insurance maps provide this data, along with approximate property lines and designations of which properties were residential. Of the two maps closest in year to the 1910 census, the 1912 map is the most useful. Easton's streets have been renumbered several times and both the 1907 and 1912 maps contain, in places, both old and new street numbers for a given structure. In general, the 1912 street numbers more closely match the 1910 census. The use of certain structures also changed over time. A building in use in 1907 as a dwelling occasionally became a store by 1912. The 1912 map was dated most closely to the 1910 census, so I used this map as the basis for tracing the census route.

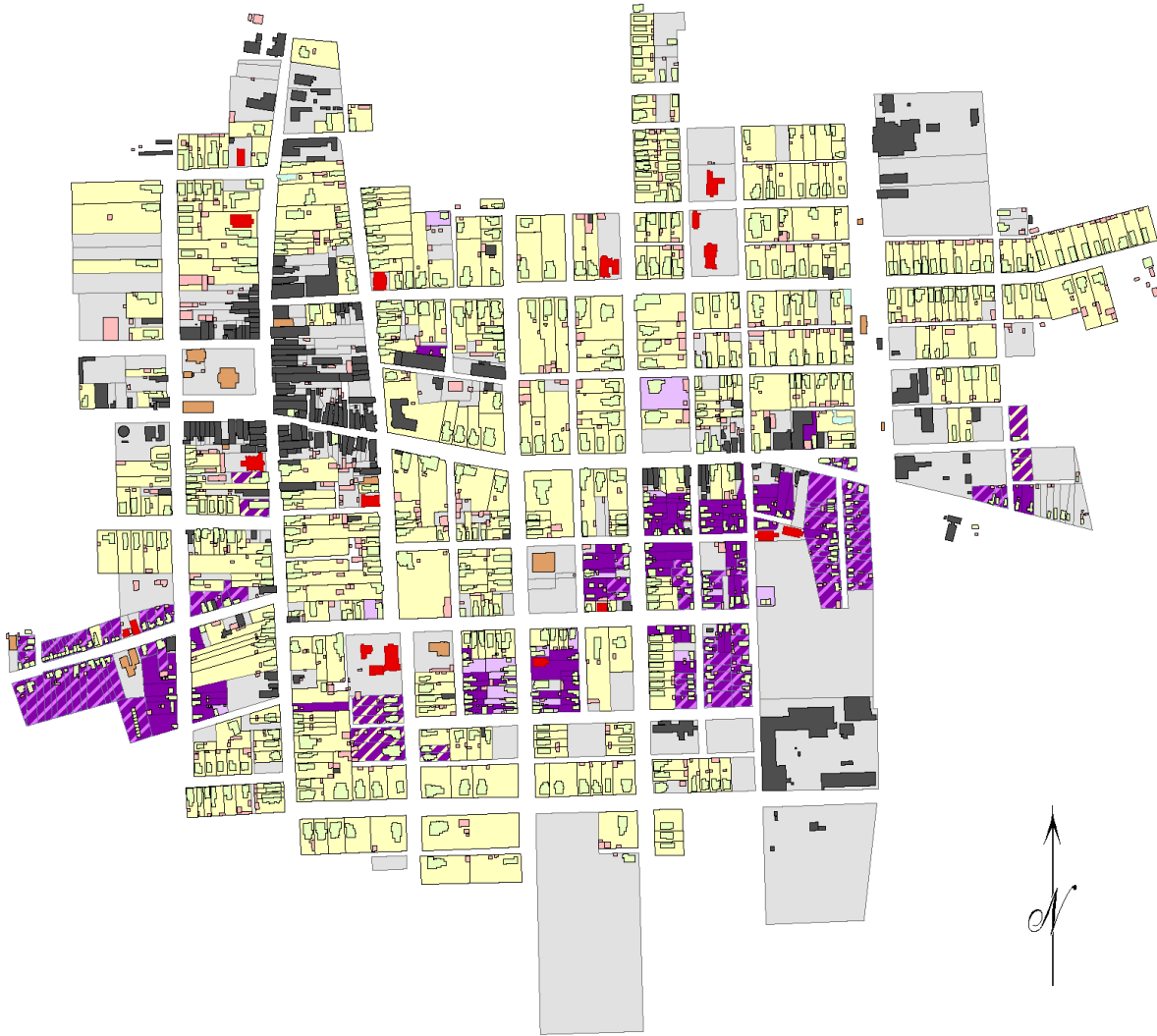
Reading through the census, reconstructing the census-taker's route is fairly straightforward. Almost all households are listed in groups along a particular portion of a particular street. Because house numbers, where listed, appear consecutively, it was possible to track where on the street the census-taker was walking. Where street numbers were not listed, it is also clear in many places where the route turns from one segment of street down an adjoining street. In the majority of cases, the census-taker proceeded around all sides of one town block and then moved on to an adjacent block. There are some jumps in the census that make tracing the route difficult and these contribute to the few areas where housing identifications are made with hesitancy or not at all.

Because the Sanborn maps identify the number of dwellings on each block of each street, I was able in most cases to match households on a street segment in the census with houses depicted on the historic map. In some places, the number of census households and the number of Sanborn dwellings match exactly. In other places, they do not and it becomes impossible, without a complete record of street numbers for households, to determine which households lived in which houses. There are either too many households and it is unclear where families doubled-up or there are too many houses and it is unclear which house(s) were vacant. There is insufficient 1:1 correlation between the census and the Sanborn maps to perform analysis on complex, discontinuous factors such as household size and composition, occupation and the associated social class, and wealth and homeownership. Therefore, I was unable to perform a richer intersectional analysis of residential patterns. However, the consistency of racial identity along particular street segments made mapping race in Easton rather straightforward. Even when the number of households and houses did not match or when for other reasons exact matches between household and dwelling were impossible, most street segments were home to families of identical racial composition.

and on Hanson Street, even here, they lived alongside white neighbors (Cynthia V. Schmidt, personal interview October 17, 2018). By 1910, these porous boundaries had hardened and almost all people of African descent lived in one of three solidly African-American neighborhoods.

Figure 1.5 displays a map of Easton's racial geography in 1910. It is based on residence and on the race of the head of household. Tracing the census route using house numbers, street corners, and process of elimination, I identified as many houses as possible, whether they bore street numbers on the census or not. These then served as anchor points for manually interpolating the race of houses to which I could not match a specific household. I have left some houses unclassified where the identity of the householder is unclear and I do not feel comfortable assigning race to the head of household. In cases where exact matches could not be made but the entire identifiable street segment contained households headed by people of the same race, I have made a racial identification. In cases where identifiable street segments contained unmatched household heads of multiple races, regardless of ratio, I have noted the races represented on those street segments. For the vast majority of properties, I was able to make a racial identification with a reasonable degree of certainty. Most areas of uncertainty were sections of town where both black and mulatto heads of household lived side by side. The map does not include two Chinese men living together somewhere along Harrison Street. They are the only people living in Easton in 1910 who were neither white, black, nor mulatto. However, the section of the census that contains their entries was one of the rare instances where the route became too muddled to make out. Therefore, although imperfect, the map reconstructs a reasonably reliable picture of racial distribution by residence in Easton in the early twentieth century. The picture of Easton's racial geography that emerges from this merger of the census

Figure 1.5



## Easton, Maryland, by Race, 1910

This map is constructed from the 1912 Sanborn fire insurance map of Easton, Maryland, with racial designations based on the 1910 U.S. census. Only a few census households are marked with complete addresses but the majority of the route is traceable and street segments have been interpolated subjectively with a reasonable degree of certainty. Hashed areas indicate street segments where households of several races occurred and could not be assigned precisely with certainty.

### Parcels1912

- Unclassified
- White
- Black
- Mulatto
- Black/Mulatto
- Black/White

### Structures1912

- Dwelling
- Outbuilding
- Boarding House
- Commercial
- Church
- Public

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4  
Kilometers

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4  
Miles

Tracy H. Jenkins  
January 2018



and insurance maps reveals a high degree of residential segregation by race in Easton by 1910.

Almost all African Americans lived in one of three solidly African-American neighborhoods. The eastern two of these were located on The Hill and the western of the three along Port Street in what residents today call The Bottom. In these neighborhoods, people who the census identifies as black and mulatto lived side by side. There do not appear to be clear divisions along color within the African-American community in terms of spatial distribution. Most people married someone of the same color as themselves, but there were many mixed black and mulatto households too. Easton's three African-American churches sit at the centers of each of these three neighborhoods. If congregation membership may be roughly approximated by proximity between churches and houses—that is to say, that people tend generally to attend the nearest church—then all three congregations also appear to have been mixed in terms of color within the African-American population.

The boundaries between African-American and white sections of Easton were fairly rigid and generally followed street segments on which houses fronted. For example, the central of the three African-American neighborhoods, which lay around Bethel A.M.E. church, was bounded by South Street, Thoroughgood Lane, Talbot Street, and Talbot Lane. However, only one African-American house fronted on that section of South Street and this was on the corner with Thoroughgood Lane. All other African-American houses in this two-block area fronted on Thoroughgood Lane, Talbot Street, Talbot Lane, or Hanson Street. None of the white houses on the two blocks fronted on these other street segments. With one exception, therefore, anyone traveling South Street, the widest and most well-traveled street of the five within this area, would have been presented by a row of white-occupied houses with an African-American neighborhood behind them. In similar fashion, though a row of four white-owned properties appear to break up

the western African-American neighborhood in The Bottom, along West Street, all four of these houses actually front on Washington Street on the far side of the block from the African-American neighborhood. Areas of African-American residence therefore were fairly strongly segregated from other parts of town where only white people lived.

A small number of African Americans, both black and mulatto, lived outside of these segregated neighborhoods, surrounded by white neighbors. Among these, one household included a mulatto head of household married to a white wife; their children were also identified as white. In this case, the mulatto father's social world would appear to be identified with that of his white family and white neighbors. In other cases, a handful of African Americans may have taken up space where it was convenient or available. There does appear to be one white household in the midst of the African-American neighborhood in The Bottom, on the western side of town. This household bears a street number in the census and therefore must be solidly affixed in place. Assuming the street number is correct, then this white family occupied the largest house on the north side of Port Street between the church and Pleasant Avenue. There were therefore outliers in the racial segregation of the town, but the racial boundaries in Easton had by 1910 become fairly stark.

Although African Americans had often resided within white households in the nineteenth century, either as enslaved or free servants, this practice virtually disappeared by 1910. The case is clearly evident in boarding houses. In 1870, all five boarding houses in Easton were owned and rented by white residents. Each of the five houses employed African-American servants, who appear at the end of the household's census listing, which was the typical placement for live-in domestic servants. By 1910, only one African-American man appears in this situation in

the census. African-American servants most likely continued to work for these boarding houses but they did not reside there.

Residential segregation to some extent constrained the physical growth of Easton's African-American neighborhoods. The central neighborhood around Bethel Church was particularly constrained because white-owned properties completely surrounded it. As street segments became solidly segregated, increase in available housing in this neighborhood required subdivision of lots into smaller parcels (Schmidt 2014; Schmidt 2016). The Port Street community could expand westward, but this took them further from the center of town. The eastern neighborhood around Asbury Church had the greatest potential for expansion in the undeveloped block south of the church. Much of this area remained industrial. However, by the 1940s, the town had connected South Street and Grahams Alley and rows of small duplexes stood along both sides of the South Street extension and along the eastern side of Higgins Street between South Street and Talbot Lane (Sanborn 1941:5,11). Almost all of these houses still stand.

The rise of segregation also elevated African Americans' sense of place as they invested more heavily in particular parts of Easton. The stabilization of racial residential boundaries meant that homes were more likely to pass from one member of the community to another—perhaps a relative or friend or member of the same church—rather than to white residents. A comparison of one street segment in an African-American neighborhood from 1900 to 1910 demonstrates significant turnover among residents, most of whom rented their houses. In 1900, six households lived on Talbot Lane between South Street and Talbot Street. Their locations cannot be identified specifically because the census that year did not list street numbers. However, the households all appear consecutively. Assuming no drastic changes in Easton's

racial geography between 1900 and 1910, they would have occupied six of the nine houses on that segment of Talbot Lane that appear on the Sanborn map the next year (1901:7). Of these families, only George Tilghman's family still lived in their house in 1910. All other residents on this segment of Talbot Lane changed between the two censuses. Significantly, only Tilghman owned his house and he did so free of a mortgage (USDI 1900a:12B). Turnover in residents continued through the years that followed (USBC 1920; USBC 1930; USBC 1940). Despite this turnover, the new residents remained either black or mulatto. The sense of place created by sequential African-American residents may have ameliorated in part the challenges that Segregation posed.

Living independently of white folks, as the majority of free African Americans did from the late eighteenth century onward, enabled free African Americans to raise their children as they saw fit without direct interference from any form of white paternalism such as that which characterized much of life for those who were held in bondage. Nevertheless, some free African Americans sacrificed this independence in order to access employment and to maintain family integrity when some family members remained enslaved. Autonomy and family unity therefore sometimes clashed but the struggle toward both drove much of free African-American family life in the nineteenth century. Segregation increased the domestic independence of African Americans within their households by the early twentieth century. However, it also complicated employment and household income, taking parents away from their families because few families or parts of families lived with employers anymore and had to travel to work outside of the home. Because of these changing but continued stresses on the family despite some measure of increase in family integrity, community members outside the household continued to play a large role in raising successive generations.

*Family size*

Free African Americans typically lived in smaller households and had fewer children than white people and enslaved African Americans. This trend continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in both Talbot County as a whole and in Easton.

Throughout the county generally, an urban/rural divide and overall decrease in household size set the background for evaluating the size of free African-American household size in Talbot County from 1790 through 1910. The statistics for average household size indicate that the residents of Easton tended to have smaller households than Talbot County residents at large. Most of Talbot County is rural and was more so in the nineteenth century. Labor-intensive agricultural work required larger, compound households including extended families, hired hands, and (before Emancipation) enslaved workers. Mixed households that included white and

**Table 1.3: Average Household Size in Talbot County by Race and Status:  
All Enumerated Combinations**

Year	White	White and African-American			African-American			Chinese	All
	White Only	White and Enslaved	Mixed	White and Free Af-Am	Enslaved Only	Colored Mixed	Free Af-Am Only		
1790	5.3	12.7	18.4	8.5	16.5	4.8	4.3		9.0
1800	5.5	12.4	17.2	7.1	13.9	6.0	4.6		8.7
1810 <sup>15</sup>	5.5	14.6	16.2	9.2	12.0				11.6
1820	5.7	13.9	16.8	8.4	12.8	5.1	4.9		9.1
1830	5.5	11.9	17.4	7.1	2.7	5.2	5.2		8.8
1820 Easton	4.9	10.2	11.7	7.1		4.5	4.2		6.9
1870 Easton	4.8	9.0			5.1				6.2
1910 Easton	4.2	4.7			3.3			2.0	3.9

This table breaks down the average household size in Talbot County in available federal decennial censuses according to the racial and legal makeup of the household. Multiracial households remained consistently the largest households in Talbot County for over 100 years. Households made up solely by free African Americans remained consistently the smallest.

<sup>15</sup> Because of the likely issues with the 1810 data, the outliers here are most likely unreliable.

both enslaved and free African Americans maintained the position as the largest average household size throughout the years for which data were available. Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, average household size in Easton decreased across all household types. During this general decrease in household size, multiracial, mixed-status households remained considerably larger on average than single-race households.

Free African-American households in Talbot County before the Civil War ranged in size from single individuals to multigenerational households of 10 or more. The first federal census in 1790 listed 12 free people of color living on their own (USDS 1790a; USDS 1790b) and various individuals continued to do so throughout the nineteenth century. The largest free-African-American-only household in the antebellum period was that of Mark Sewell in 1830. The Sewell household was made up of one adult man aged over 55, probably Mark himself, a woman between 36 and 55, seven men between 24 and 36, three young men and/or boys and two young women and/or girls between 10 and 24, and both a young boy and girl below age 10 (USDS 1830a:9). The broad range of ages in the Sewell household suggests that it included multiple generations and the large number of men in their 20s and 30s suggests that at least some of these were hired hands. Multigenerational and compound-family households tend toward a different nature of child-rearing than that which takes place in nuclear-family households, with a greater number and variety of adults playing roles in a child's life. I will explore these arrangements and relationships more below (See Tables 1.7–1.12). Such large households were, however, exceptions to the norm for free people of color in the antebellum period.

Immediately after the end of slavery, for residents living in Easton, family sizes much resembled those of the antebellum period. Since a large proportion of African Americans

continued to live in multiracial households of various relationships that the census does not define, these large households continued to play a sizeable part in the town's social landscape. The top 17 largest households in Easton in 1870, those of 13 or more individuals, included both white and African-American members. The top 5 largest of these were boarding houses and hotels. They, along with one other smaller boarding house, all included African-American servants among their residents, both as individuals and along with family members not employed within these households. Meanwhile, among the majority of African Americans residing in African-American-only households, the average household size increased substantially. The age profile of the African-American population of Easton in 1870 does not suggest a major baby boom (See Figure 1.16). Therefore, the rise in average household size may relate to the new level freedom that formerly enslaved family members found to unite under the same roof with their relatives. Although some had managed to live with free relatives in previous decades, the end of slavery opened this possibility to all people of color, if they could locate their relatives.

By 1910, the average African-American household in Easton included only 3.3 members. However a few African-American households were still quite large. The two largest of these were the Joneses on South Lane, at 12 members and the Bondleys on Dover Road, at 11. The Jones household included Henry and Harriett Jones, their eight children aged 0 to 19, and Harriett's mother and sister. John and Mary Bondley had nine children and, despite a 13-year age gap between them, John and Mary's marriage was the first for both and their children all their own. These large families with many children were outliers. 94% of African-American-headed households in 1910 Easton had 4 or fewer children and 50% had no children at all, 9% higher than the corresponding percentage of white families. The largest households in Easton in 1910 were seven boarding houses, in which a large number of 7 or more boarders make up the

vast majority of the household. The only boarding house run by or utilized by African Americans was that run by Alexander Sewell on Dover Road. Sewell's boarders included men, women, and a family, the Robertses, whose father was away from town (USDS 1910:33B). Sewell's boarding house was among the smaller boarding houses in Easton at this time and he boarded fewer than half the number of the largest white boarding house. African Americans participated actively in boarding and 25% of boarders in Easton were African American. However, most of these were widely dispersed: 13% of African-American-headed households included one or two boarders. In sum, African Americans made up a smaller proportion of the boarding population than of the total population. Both smaller numbers of children and of boarders contributed to the lower average household size among African Americans than whites in Easton in the early twentieth century.

From the beginning of the federal census in 1790 through the early twentieth century, therefore, African American households remained consistently smaller, on average, than white households. Household size for African Americans gradually increased throughout the antebellum period, almost closing the gap with white families by 1830. However, by 1910, the gap had widened again. In the early twentieth century, average household size had fallen for every type of household. Yet, it fell most dramatically for African-American-only households.

Relative household size in Talbot County was consistent with patterns elsewhere in the Upper South. In her study of antebellum Loudoun County, Virginia, Stevenson finds that free African-American families, on average, were smaller and had fewer children than white families. This was due in large part to age of marriage and the pacing of childbirth. Free women of color in Loudoun began bearing children at the same age (Stevenson 1996:21–22) as white women, but the spacing between their children was greater (34 months compared to 24 months). “The



longer and more fractured childbearing patterns of free women of color, higher child mortality rates, the involuntary removal of poor black children from their homes, and the voluntary apprenticeship of others, altogether meant smaller numbers of children in free black households.” Free African-American men, particularly, also generally started having children later in life than other categories of people (Stevenson 1996:311).

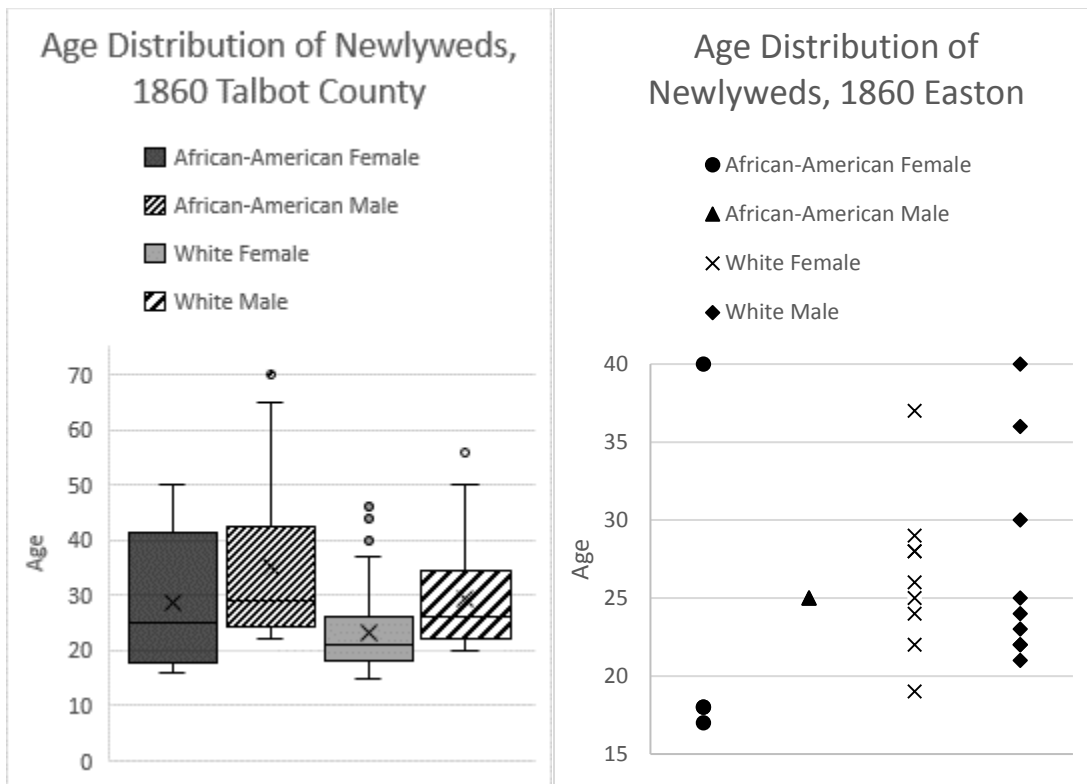
To test whether the similar pattern of smaller households in Talbot County to that in Loudoun County may be attributable to the same causes that Stevenson identifies, I begin with an assessment of marriage demographics among Talbot’s free African-American and white populations. Censuses data on marriage first become available in 1860, when the census included a check-mark column for indicating which county residents had been married within the year.<sup>16</sup> In the population of 11075, 25 African Americans and 111 white people had been married in the year preceding the census. This accounts for .8% of the free African-American population and 1% of the white population. Therefore, proportionally, slightly fewer African Americans were married that year than white residents in Talbot County. In Easton, the disparity was 0.4 percentage points wider at 1.9% of free African Americans and 2.3% of whites. However, the difference was still slim.

Within the newlywed population of Talbot County, the recorded marriage age varied from 15 to 70. The census indicates one marriage of a 7-year-old white girl and one of a 13-year-old mulatto girl, but these may be errors within the original 1860 enumeration. In the latter case, the check-mark in the married column is part of a paired notation indicating a married

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, marriage reported in the census is not always an accurate reflection of legal marriages or of actual partner relationships. Informal relationships may sometimes be reported as marriages and sometimes not (Frazier 1939:328). In all societies, informal relationships have led to children and may function more or less as formal relationships. Women may also report themselves as widowed when their husbands have abandoned them (Frazier 1939:328). The census thus provides an imperfect record of marriage and other associated social relations. However, as a means of roughing out a picture of family structure, marriage data in the census are quite suggestive of certain trends.

couple but the notations cross over household boundaries and were probably entered on the wrong lines. The notation for the 7-year-old's marriage appears on its own, rather than beside a notation for a spouse, which is unusual, and the mark here may have been intended for a mark in the adjacent column indicating that she attended school that year. Correcting these two likely errors, the youngest newlywed in the county was a white girl at the age of 15. Although the 1<sup>st</sup> quartiles of marriage ages among African-American and white women are roughly equal, the average age among white women was also younger. The oldest newlyweds among African Americans tended to be significantly older than the oldest white newlyweds. The maximum age for African-American women married in this year was greater even than the eldest outlier among



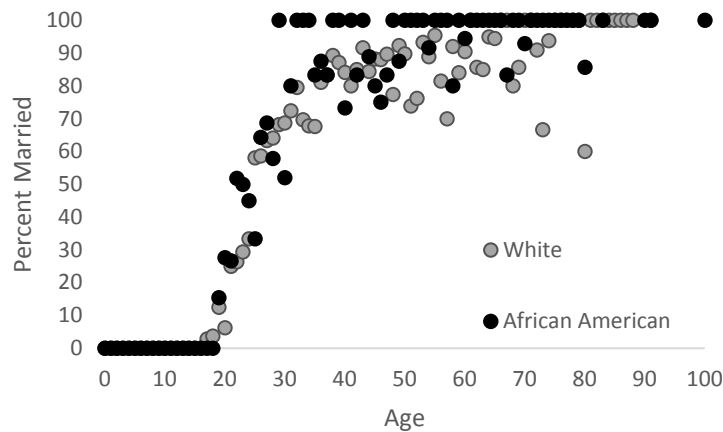
**Figure 1.6:** Age distributions of newlyweds in 1860, Talbot County and Easton. The smaller data sample from Easton makes complex statistical comparison difficult, especially for African Americans. However, on the whole, more marriages later in life took place among African Americans than European Americans during this period.

white women. The oldest African-American man newly married was 14 years older than the oldest newly-married white man. Marriage at these old ages was more likely a second or third marriage than a first one and greater rates of marriage at greater ages among African Americans signifies the difficulty with which they struggled to maintain nuclear family integrity, discussed further below.

The distribution of marriage ages among Talbot County's newlyweds was greater in 1860 among African Americans than it was among whites. Both the total range and interquartile ranges of these ages were larger, regardless of sex. The interquartile range for the marriage ages of white women was particularly narrow. Although the first quartile of marriage age was approximately the same among African American and white women, the third quartile was 15 years older among African American women. The marriage ages for white women also display a greater number of outliers. Although white women did remarry at later ages, the vast majority of them married in their late teens and in their twenties, presumably for the first time.

Almost equal numbers of white men and white women married within a year of the 1860 census. However, only two thirds as many African-American men married within the year as African-American women. This means that many of these newly-married African-American men were not present in the county living with their spouses but were off working and at a much higher rate than white newlyweds. This kind of social rupture among newlyweds made forming a stable, close-knit nuclear family life more difficult for African Americans.

The ages of Talbot County newlyweds in 1860 corroborate Stevenson's findings from Loudoun that free African Americans, especially men, tended to marry later than their white neighbors. This trend likely contributed to free African Americans' smaller average family size in Talbot County just as it did in Northern Virginia. Unfortunately, the number of African-



**Figure 1.7:** Marriage age in Easton, 1910. Each dot represents the percentage of the population at each age that was married, widowed, or divorced.

American marriages in Easton in 1860 is too small to paint much of a statistical picture. But we might safely assume that the town generally followed the county trends.

By the early twentieth century, the picture had changed dramatically. Figure 1.7 depicts the percentage of the population of each age that was married, widowed, or divorced in the 1910 census. This percentage accounts for all people who were married at that time or at some time previously. The percentage of the population that was married rose from 0% to between 70 and 100% between approximately the ages of 20 and 30, with married proportions of the adult population fluctuating between about 70% and 100% thereafter. Therefore, most people, if they got married, did so in their twenties. Although the youngest marriages were of white women aged 17 and 18, the advancing cusp of marriages among people in their twenties leans slightly toward African Americans. In other words, the percentage of married people rises faster among African Americans than it does among whites. In general, therefore, African Americans in Easton in the early twentieth century were married younger than white residents. It is unclear what this apparent reversal of the trend from 1860 means. Later marriage in the antebellum

period and earlier marriage in the early twentieth century might logically lead free African-American women to have fewer children in the former period and more children in the latter, relative to white women. However, the picture is slightly more complicated than that.

### *Numbers of children*

In addition to marriage age, the number of children in free African-American families also played a major role in household size. Stevenson identifies smaller average rates of childbirth among free African-American women than white women in antebellum Loudoun County. In Talbot County, free African-American and white children made up approximately the same proportions of their respective populations, while the enslaved population skewed younger. However, some differences emerge when considering the average number of children per household by the composition of the household.

The numbers of children per household generally follow the trends in household size—fewer in Easton than county-wide and declining over time. When complete data become available in 1820, free African-American households had significantly fewer children on average than white households. This disparity mirrors Sewell's findings for Loudoun County, Virginia. However, in Talbot, the disparity was narrower in Easton than county-wide and also diminished over time. In 1830 at the county level and in both 1870 and 1910 in Easton, the average number of children per household almost reached parity between white-only and free-African-American-only households.

**Table 1.4: Children as a Proportion of the Population**

Year	African American		White
	Free	Enslaved	
Talbot County			
1800			54%
1810			55%
1820	51%	58%	53%
1830	52%	58%	52%
1850	50%		50%
1860	50%		50%
Easton			
1820	48%	59%	49%
1850	44%		47%
1870	45%		45%
1910	36%		32%

This table charts the percentage of the white and black populations that was made up by children. Children are defined as those below age 20, for sake of consistency. Where numbers for enslaved Africans are available, this population skewed youngest. The free African-American population tended to include fewer children than the white population for most of the study period.

**Table 1.5: Average Number of Children per Household, by Household Composition**

Year	White	White and African-American			African-American			Chinese	All
	White Only	White and Enslaved	Mixed	White and Free Af-Am	Enslaved Only	Free and Enslaved Af-Am	Free Af-Am Only		
Talbot County									
1820	3.2	7.7	9.1	4.3	7.1	2.6	2.6		5.0
1830	3.0	6.6	9.2	3.5	0.9	2.6	2.8		4.9
Easton									
1820	2.5	5.4	5.8	3.5		1.7	2.0		3.5
1870	2.3	4.0			2.3				2.8
1910	1.3	1.2			1.2			0	1.3

This table charts the distribution of children across several types of households, for years with available data of this type. Larger numbers of children in households that included enslaved individuals reflects the larger proportions of enslaved children in Table 1.4.

Because of limited useable data from the census, it is difficult to assess the numbers of children in enslaved-only households. Only two years provide useable data for these statistics and they represent drastically different patterns. In both 1820 and 1830, Talbot County included only six households where only enslaved members resided, so the sample size is not large. John Tilghman's 1820 household, which included an exceptional 52 slaves, drastically raised the average number of children per enslaved household. Excluding his household brings the average number of children in enslaved-only households down to 3.2, equal in that year with the average number of children in white-only households but still higher than in households made up only by free people of color. There is still a gross difference between this number and that ten years later. The decrease in number of children is consistent across all the households of this type in the sample. Therefore, although in such a small sample individual circumstances may exude a direct impact on the total statistics, something broader appears to be taking place. Because of the slowness of change in numbers of children for all other household types, I suspect that the decrease in numbers of children per enslaved household relates to the crashing numbers of enslaved people ongoing in the 1820s in Talbot County. This historical demographic context and the economic difficulties that it implies suggests that numbers of enslaved children might have been freed or sold out of the county. However, admittedly, the sample is too small to know for certain.

Although free African-American households included equal or fewer children than white households consistently from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth, African-American women typically bore more children than white women. In 1910, the average African-American adult woman had born 4.9 children. The average white woman had born 3.9. This had been the case since the nineteenth century at least. When broken down according to age

cohorts in order to project these data back into the nineteenth century, the total adult female population demonstrates consistent disparity between African-American and white women in number of children born. Women in their twenties and seventies had bourn approximately equal numbers of children, regardless of race, and white women in their eighties had bourn 0.8 more children, on average. However, in all other age cohorts, African-American women had bourn one to two more children on average than white women.

The population of African-American women counted in the 1910 census included, among its older members, women who had been enslaved until the 1860s. Formerly enslaved women’s reproductive histories would have impacted the average statistics in 1910 for children born for their race. However, because the typical numbers of children per household for enslaved households are unclear, this impact is undefined. If 1830 is an aberration amid economic struggle for the county, then enslaved women may well have born more children on average than

**Table 1.6: Average Number of Children Born by Adult Women, Easton, 1910**

Age Cohort	African-American	White
10 to 19	3.0	2.0
20 to 29	1.9	2.0
30 to 39	3.9	2.8
40 to 49	6.3	4.1
50 to 59	5.9	5.0
60 to 69	7.3	5.2
70 to 79	5.8	5.6
80 to 89	4.4	5.2
90 to 99	5.0	3.0
100+	5.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>

This table charts the childbearing of Easton women in 1910. African-American women consistently bore more children than white women. This is true of women still in their childbearing years and of those who were no longer capable of bearing children, suggesting that the disparity had existed since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.



free African-American or white women. This would make sense, since the average numbers of children were consistently lower in free African-American households than in white households. If this was the case, then the numbers of children born by African-American women who lived in Easton in 1910 were raised by the inclusion of formerly enslaved women in the by-that-point entirely free African-American population. In any case, when formerly enslaved African-American women and those who had been free all their lives are grouped together as they were in the 1910 census, African-American women tended to bear more children than white women throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

It is unclear whether this trend continued into the early twentieth century, given the parity among women in their twenties in average number of children born. The relative numbers of children born by women in their teens reflect the nineteenth-century pattern. However, the statistics are based on a number of only three white and two black women. Of the three white women, only one had born any children. This sample is too small to establish a verifiable trend. The population of adult women in their twenties included 315 individuals and was the largest cohort of adult women in Easton in 1910. However, since women often continued to bear children into their thirties and sometimes into their forties, the number of children born by women in their twenties at the time of the census does not represent well the number of children they would have over the course of their lives. It is possible that the nineteenth-century pattern, in which African-American women tended to have more children on average than white women, continued into the early twentieth century. However, this is not certain.

The census data on children per household and on births therefore do not fully support for Talbot County Stevenson's observation in Loudoun of lower numbers of children among antebellum free residents of color than among white residents. Children made up roughly equal

proportions of the population when comparing free African-American and white residents from 1790 through 1910. Enslaved women may well have been encouraged to have more children than free women did, but the higher proportion of children among the enslaved population may also be tied to earlier mortality among adults in that group, given the hard work and poor conditions that slaves experienced (Douglass 1845). After the Civil War, African Americans consistently bore more children than white residents. Still, the proportion of children to adults remained roughly on par between the races. Where then, did these children go? I will discuss further below that rates of child mortality and apprenticeship outside the home, both of which Steven suggests could help to explain the smaller free African-American family sizes in Loudoun County and both of which characterized life for free families of color in Talbot County as well.

### *Nuclear families*

Despite later marriage ages, especially for men, and smaller numbers of children per household, antebellum free African-American families strove create a family life that would fulfil basic human social needs as well as provide cultural support. The types of families that emerged among free African Americans depended on cultural norms and on the constraints of practicality. Household family structures can be grouped generally into those that are nuclear families and those that are extended families. The former are based fundamentally on marriage: children may come and go, but a family comes into being through a marriage (or informal coupling) and dissolves with the death of one of the spouses or with a divorce. The latter are consanguineal families based on blood relationships (Lee 1982:108–112).

In West Africa, the many peoples from whom Maryland's enslaved population were drawn in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most likely practiced a variety of family structures. Some groups built dwelling compounds consisting of multiple houses to suit the needs of polygamous and extended families, rather than building single dwellings to house a family unit composed of a father, mother, and children. Although historians and ethnographers alike have previously pictured all of West Africa—and even all of Africa—as characterized by such multidwelling family compounds based around extended blood relations, the idea of a universal and essential “African extended family” is a myth and an overgeneralization. There is great diversity of family structures within Africa and probably always has been. Part of the reason for this is constant sociocultural evolution (Alber et al. 2010:44). Ethnoarchaeologists attempting to develop ethnographic analogies for reconstructing poorly-documented living arrangements based on limited material evidence have also been forced to confront a great deal of variation even at the village level (David 1971). Enslaved Africans thus probably brought with them to Maryland a variety of ideas about proper family structure.

Slavery disrupted all kinds of families, though cultural concepts of family were portable and the archaeology of slave quarters sometimes reflects a residential organization similar to some West-African compounds (Fesler 2004:213–215). As historian Jennifer Hull Dorsey describes, nuclear families were the focus of African-American family life in Maryland by the beginning of the American Revolution. Nuclear families on plantations often had their own dwellings. Almost as many African Americans as whites lived in two-parent households. Even family members separated on different plantations could reasonably expect their owners to make accommodations for visiting one another. “Only in the nineteenth century and in response to the threat that the domestic slave trade posed to the standard nuclear African American family did a

broader definition of family emerge...It was a supplementary structure meant to support the nuclear family, not replace it” (Dorsey 2011:71–72). The nuclear family may therefore have been the one most familiar to the first generations of African Americans exiting slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, it was not the only family concept at their disposal.

The question thus becomes: what kinds of family structures did African Americans create for themselves once they escaped bondage? Erica Ball’s (2012) assessment of antebellum discourses among middle-class free African Americans suggests that this segment of the free population, at least, valued the nuclear family highly and built their social organization around it. She describes, for example, how Solomon Northup’s 1853 narrative *12 Years a Slave* concludes with a tableau of his return to his wife and children (Ball 2012:81–83). Of course, ex-slave narratives were also geared largely at white audiences and may have played up Euro-American conceptions of family in order to attract emotional—and political—support for antislavery. Did these discourses reflect reality or were they rhetorical ideals, and did these ideals carry over to free African Americans who were not middle-class?

E. Franklin Frazier’s (1939) study of the black family and its origins also associates the nuclear family with the antebellum free African-American middle class, specifically. He argued that free people of color before Emancipation tended to follow a nuclear family, patriarchal model more closely aligned with Euro-American norms. This may have been due to closer familial and cultural affiliations that free people of color had with white society, given that three fifths of free people of color in the U.S. in 1850 had at least some European ancestry (Frazier 1939:188). Frazier also acknowledged the benefits of modeling white culture in a society ruled by white privilege and supremacy, both among African Americans who passed for white (Frazier

1939:207) and those who engaged in a politics of respectability (Frazier 1939:267). Whatever the cause, Frazier saw a stability in the free black patriarchal nuclear family that he saw lacking in the first generations of emancipated slaves after the Civil War, whose explorations of their new freedom he argued produced social disorder.

Even among free people of color, however, the nuclear family was far from universal. Much of Frazier's data are anecdotal, rather than systematic, and he acknowledges that his assessment of early free African-American family structure focuses on the more successful and upwardly mobile families, which are not necessarily representative of the whole group (Frazier 1939:194). Frazier associated stable, nuclear, patriarchal family structure largely with the "upper social class" of African-American communities, both before and after Emancipation. Indeed, he attributed a causal linkage between this family structure and the social prestige and economic success of these lineages, arguing that they based their status on the ability to acquire and pass down property, along with values of hard work and discipline (Frazier 1939:245–246). This causality may be more speculation than fact. However, it is certainly possible that differences in family structure within free African-American communities existed along class lines. Frazier notes the great diversity of shapes and sizes that family life among newly free African Americans took in the immediate aftermath of Emancipation (Frazier 1939:89–181). The earlier generations of free African Americans, with their abilities to form family units freely sometimes hamstrung because some of their relatives were still enslaved, most likely put together a similarly wide variety of households. The place of the nuclear family in free African-American communities thus becomes an empirical question (Semmes 2001:13–14).

In her study of free African Americans in antebellum Loudoun County, Virginia, Stevenson uses the presence of two or more adults of opposite sexes to determine the presence of

a “probable-nuclear core household” among households headed by free people of color. She finds that most independent free African-American households in Loudoun were based on nuclear families (Stevenson 1996:308–310). Dorsey’s claim that the Eastern Shore of Maryland followed a similar trend is not based on this method, but on her more distant and narrower picture of an increasing rate at which free African Americans lived independently from whites, the limitations of which I have described above. Stevenson’s method is also flawed because it makes assumptions about relationships within households for data in which those relationships are not specified.<sup>17</sup> However, it provides one possible approach to the question of household structure. When Stevenson’s method is applied to census data from Talbot County and to Easton, the results are fairly similar: approximately 70% of free-African-American-only households in the antebellum period were likely nuclear families at their core, perhaps with additional family members and others also in the household. These households accounted for approximately half of the Talbot County free African-American population. The proportion of the population living under such arrangements is lower than the proportion of free African-American nuclear-core households because of the numbers of free African Americans living in households with white or enslaved members.

Rates of nuclear-family living arrangements impacted the way that children were brought up. In Loudoun County, Virginia, where “most free black children lived in homes where at least one of their parents and an adult of the opposite sex was present...independent free African-American households were similar to those of county whites and quite distinct from those of local slaves” (Stevenson 1996:310). Although the proportion of Talbot County’s free African-American children living in these circumstances dipped below a majority in 1830, it was

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<sup>17</sup> There is some danger of introducing a heteronormative bias that assumes paired couples of opposite-sex adults are husband and wife, rather than parent-child, siblings, or some other relationship.

**Table 1.7: Probable-Nuclear Core Households in Talbot County**

Location	Talbot County		Easton		
	1820	1830	1820	1870	1910
Percentage of households among free-African-American-only households	71%	67%	73%	88%	59%
Percent inclusive of total free African-American population	55%	48%	57%	70%	69%
Percent inclusive of total free African-American children	54%	47%	55%	70%	64%

Probable-Nuclear Core Households are those that included at least one adult male and one adult female. This table charts the rates of nuclear-core households as they relate to the distributions of free African-American households, the free African-American population, and free African-American children, specifically. It is important to distinguish these rates because of the dispersal of free people of color living in various domestic environments.

true here that living arrangements among free people of color more closely resembled other free white people's than those of enslaved people. White children overwhelmingly lived in probable-nuclear core households regardless of whether there were also free or enslaved African Americans present.

During the antebellum period, the proportions of probable-nuclear core households and the free people of color that they represented much resembled the rates of nuclear living arrangements elsewhere in Talbot County. After the Civil War, the rate of nuclear-family living shot up dramatically as families reunited. The percentage of African-American households that had nuclear families at their core fell again by the early twentieth century. However, because nuclear-core households tended to be larger than those of people living in various other arrangements, the proportion of the population living in those households fell only marginally and remained significantly above pre-war levels. In 1910, nuclear relations to the head of household accounted for 87% of familial relationships within African-American-headed households. This rate was almost equal to that for white-headed households, 88%. Before the Civil War, a majority of people lived in households where they were related to the head of household by nuclear-level family connections. After the war, the vast majority did so. Nuclear

families were therefore by far the norm for white residents and, by 1910, African-American individuals achieved these relationships at approximately equal rates.

Despite this resemblance, free African-American children grew up with fewer adults around them within their immediate households than did white children. This was because, in nuclear-core households, there were often additional adults—servants, boarders, and other family members—and white children were more likely to live in the larger of these compound households. This trend remained consistent from the antebellum period into the early twentieth century. Free children of color in Talbot County were 9% more likely than white children to live in single-adult households in 1820 and 10% more likely to do so in 1830. In Easton, the gap was slightly smaller, at 7% in 1820. In 1870, the gap closed. However, by 1910 it had reopened to a massive 21% difference. During the nineteenth century, growing up in a household with one adult often meant living with a single parent. It could also, however, mean boarding with a master to whom one was apprenticed. By 1910, in Easton at least, this practice had ceased. Free African-American children were far more likely to grow up at home with only one parent. In either case, throughout the period of study, free African-American children were less likely than white children to live at home in complete nuclear families.

Across households of varying numbers of adults, the distributions of free African-American children skew toward fewer adults, when compared to the distributions of white children. This disparity remained consistent in all sampled censuses from 1820 through 1910. For example, in the early twentieth century, African-American children were 19% more likely to live in single-adult households. White children were 12% more likely to live in two-adult households. The numbers for three-to-four-parent households are closer together. White children were 6% more likely to live in households with five or more adults. The nineteenth-



**Table 1.8: Distribution of Children by Number of Adults in Household, by Race and Status, 1820 Talbot County**

Number of Adults	Race and Status of Child		
	Free African American	Enslaved	White
0	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%
1	9.82%	0.60%	2.36%
2	27.89%	3.74%	18.68%
3	24.67%	5.00%	20.33%
4	18.63%	7.76%	16.94%
5	5.64%	8.49%	12.38%
6	4.54%	7.49%	7.88%
7	1.59%	10.12%	6.39%
8	2.91%	6.29%	3.79%
9	0.35%	4.91%	2.62%
10 or more	3.96%	45.60%	8.53%

**Table 1.9: Distribution of Children by Number of Adults in Household, by Race and Status, 1820 Easton**

Number of Adults	Race and Status of Child		
	Free African American	Enslaved	White
0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
1	7.08%	0.51%	1.22%
2	45.54%	10.43%	22.96%
3	27.08%	10.43%	23.22%
4	5.85%	17.81%	13.37%
5	10.15%	11.70%	13.78%
6	2.46%	8.40%	8.95%
7	1.54%	10.94%	5.13%
8	0.00%	15.27%	4.74%
9	0.00%	4.83%	3.22%
10 or more	0.31%	9.67%	3.41%

Free African-American children in Easton were 18% more likely to live in two-adult households than free African-American children county-wide. This suggests greater ability in town to achieve nuclear families. However, at 4 and 5 adults, the trend is unclear. It flips and flops. If, indeed, there were stronger nuclear families in town, despite the large gap in teenaged children, then the seeming normality in the county pyramid hides a lot of disruption.

**Table 1.10: Distribution of Children by Number of Adults in Household, by Race, 1870 Easton**

Number of Adults	Race of Child	
	African-American	White
1	3.86%	2.57%
2	36.96%	29.91%
3	25.36%	18.90%
4	14.73%	13.39%
5	5.80%	11.56%
6	3.86%	6.97%
7	3.62%	3.12%
8	0.97%	1.65%
9	1.69%	2.75%
10 or more	3.14%	9.17%

After the Civil War, when the free African-American population absorbed that of the enslaved, the distribution of children continued to reflect that of the free population before the war. Gradually over the ensuing two generations, household size in general dwindled. Racial segregation in housing and the expulsion of African-American laborers from white households in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced many more single-parent households among African Americans. While white children had always tended to live in households with more adults, this disparity grew tremendously by 1910.

**Table 1.11: Distribution of Children by Number of Adults in Household, by Race, 1910 Easton**

Number of Adults	Race of Child	
	African-American	White
1	21.60%	3.01%
2	41.67%	53.72%
3	22.53%	22.92%
4	9.57%	10.03%
5 or More	4.63%	10.32%

century distributions follow similar patterns. These numbers do include non-family-members in the count of adults, with the understanding that all adults in a household, including cooks, nurses, etc., would have played some role in the child's upbringing. Before Emancipation, non-family adults also included enslaved men and women. Free African-American households included far fewer of these types of adult members than did white households. White children therefore had greater access to adults within the immediate confines of the household. The African-American community needed to network the raising of children between households in order to achieve the same level of social access.

In order to fulfill children's needs for parenting and access to adults, extended family members and step-parents played numerically greater roles in the lives of African-American families than they did in white families. Specific data on relationships between household members is only available for Easton in 1910, out of the censuses sampled. Table 1.12 breaks down familial relationships by generation. In this year, very few grandparents of the head of household were counted in the census. However, African-American grandparents made up more than twice the proportion of the family-related population that white grandparents did. African-American grandchildren and great-grandchildren likewise made up larger proportions of household relationships. African-American families therefore were more intergenerational than white families. Grandparents and other extended family members played larger roles in African-American children's lives than they did in white children's.

Step-relationships also accounted for a greater proportion of familial relationships among African-American families than they did among white families. African-American step-children and adopted children accounted for more than three times the proportion of intra-household relationships than did white step- and adopted children. Among white children, blood ties

overwhelmingly predominate. The higher rates of step-parenting and adoption among African Americans in 1910 Easton indicate that, although by this time the African-American population achieved nuclear-based households at roughly equal rates to the white population, they struggled to maintain those relationships and actively reconstituted them, where nuclear families were broken, in order to achieve that parity. These compound families testify to African-Americans' desire to achieve the nuclear norm of family life.

The lengths to which free African Americans went to maintain nuclear families in the face of slavery, work opportunities, and premature mortality demonstrate the commitment of many of them, though perhaps not all, to the nuclear family as an ideal. To some degree, if the nuclear family was more common among African Americans who were middle-class, then the growing prevalence of nuclear families over the course of the nineteenth century may reflect, in part, growth in the African-American middle class in Talbot County. Nevertheless, free African-American families had a more difficult time achieving this ideal than did their white neighbors.

**Table 1.12: Generational Distribution of the Population by Race, 1910 Easton**

Generational Relationship to the Householder	Race of Individual		
	White	African-American	Chinese
Grandparents	0.05%	0.12%	0.00%
Parents, Aunts, and Uncles	2.95%	2.24%	0.00%
Householders, Spouses, Siblings, and Cousins	50.36%	50.50%	100.00%
Children, Nieces, and Nephews	44.25%	41.90%	0.00%
Adopted Children	0.31%	1.12%	0.00%
Step-Children	0.47%	1.75%	0.00%
Grandchildren	2.38%	4.86%	0.00%
Great-Grandchildren	0.00%	0.37%	0.00%

The 1910 census, unlike those of the nineteenth century, defines intra-household social relationships. This makes it possible to distinguish between primarily familial and primarily work relationships, as well as to chart the composition of families in a more concrete way. White and African-American households were similarly composed in terms of relationships between parents and children. However, African-American families included grandparents and grandchildren at twice the rates of white children. They also included adopted and stepchildren at three to four times the rate of white households.

At the very least, if the statistics on nuclear family generated by Stevenson's "nuclear-core" method of interrogating the census data are accurate, then the nuclear family reached far beyond the middle class. Although common, however, the two-parent nuclear-core household was far from universal among nineteenth-century free African Americans. Another major piece of the diversity of household composition within free African-American communities both before and after Emancipation was a persistent large minority of female-headed households.

### *Female heads of household*

The dominant ideal of nuclear family espoused in American society, including among many free African Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, placed importance on the husband/father as head of household. Marriage, in the American political culture, enlarged the standing of the husband by attaching to him dependents (wife and children). According to republican theory, citizens (men, at the time) had to be independent, and maintaining sovereignty over the polity of their household was one way to do it. Among members of the nineteenth-century African-American middle classes, the free black press devoted much attention to wifely duties, since women were to support the men. They were called to defer to their husbands' authority and to manage the house frugally (Ball 2012:89–90). However much middle-class African Americans reinterpreted the dominant white, middle-class ideals of the cult of domesticity in order to envision feminine purity and influence as not restricted to the home (Ball 2012:98–99), writers still placed the husband and father as the desired head of household. The extent of such patriarchal values among working-class African Americans in this period is unknown. Whether a product of class differences or other causes,

however, male householdership was far from universal among free African Americans. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Easton and Talbot County, free women of color were significantly more likely to lead their households than were white women. E. Franklin Frazier (1939) associated consanguineal female-headed households among African Americans with the aftermath of Emancipation in 1865. However, these households were also common among free African Americans throughout the antebellum period.

The sex of the head of household was first identified in 1850. Before that, it is possible to infer the sex of most heads of household by the individual’s first name. However, there are sufficient uncertainties from sex-neutral names and names of unidentified sex that I do not feel completely comfortable making these assessments until 1850. These statistics on head of household sex for 1850 and 1860 are necessarily limited because they do not include enslaved heads of household, who are not identifiable in the census, and there is no way through these documents to tie enslaved people to the households in which they lived. Where free and enslaved African Americans lived together, I have had to assume for the present purposes that the first free person listed for the household is the head of household. Nevertheless, they present some interesting comparisons. The data for 1870 and 1910 are complete for the town of Easton. In some records, there are a handful of likely errors in household assignment that place white and

**Table 1.13: Percentage of Households Headed by Women**

Year	Talbot County		Easton	
	African American	White	African American	White
1850	31%	12%	44%	21%
1860	25%	10%	41%	24%
1870			12%	11%
1910			33%	17%

Where data are available, it is clear that African-American women consistently played larger roles as heads of household than did their white counterparts.

African-American children below age 10 as heads of household. However, the number of likely errors is small enough not to affect the following statistics.

Several clear trends emerge from these comparisons. First, there are far more women headed African-American households than white households. At times, African-American heads of household were more than twice as likely to be women as white heads of household were. Second, the rate of female householdership was significantly greater in Easton than county-wide. This was the case for both African-American and white heads of household. The difference between urban and rural living arrangements—however limitedly Easton might be considered to urban at this time—suggests less traditional and perhaps more fluid household structures in town than in the rest of the very rural county. Third, the rate of female householdership declined consistently in the census from the middle of the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. This decline held constant regardless of race and location. The records for Easton in 1870 present contradictions to two of these trends. In this year, the difference in sex of household head between African-American and white residents was very slight. The rate of female householdership for both races also dipped sharply in Easton to rates resembling the white population county-wide, meaning that the statistics for 1910 appear to jump higher even though they are consistent with the trend from 1850 when 1870 is excluded. There may therefore be issues with the data for 1870. Nevertheless, the general trend toward male-headed households characterized all households in this period while divisions of town and country and of race held steady.

The trend in larger numbers of female-headed households among African American than among white residents in Easton and Talbot County mirrors the experience of free African Americans elsewhere. In her study of the antebellum free African-American population in

Loudoun County, Virginia, Stevenson found a large and persistent minority of female-headed households (Stevenson 1996:307–310). Because women tended to own less property and to earn less money for their labor than men did, Stevenson also found that these female-headed households tended to struggle. Male-headed households tended to be bigger and were far more likely to include members of extended family (older relatives; boarders). These adults would have been more likely to contribute to the household budget, making the situation for female-headed households more difficult in comparison. In contrast, female heads of household were often the only adult present, placing responsibility on them for not only income but also for housework and raising (Stevenson 1996:308–310).

Because of the inconsistency of measurements of property value in the census, it is difficult to estimate comparable statistics of wealth in Talbot County. However, in 1850, some estimate is possible for the Talbot free African-American population, keeping within the acknowledged limits of a census that excluded enslaved family members. I have already mentioned the uncertainty surrounding enslaved heads of household with free family members. In addition, some enslaved people did own property—as evidenced by instances where people purchased their own freedom. However, it is unclear whether that kind of property, namely cash, would appear on the census. Whatever missing values there are when considering enslaved household members are not likely to be large.

Free African-American female heads of household in Talbot County, like their Loudoun County counterparts, owned much less property than African-American male heads of household. The average African-American woman householder in Talbot County at that time owned just \$7 of property, less than one fifth of the average male householder's \$41. The great majority of African-American householders of either sex held no property at all that was counted



in the census. Only 26 African-American heads of household in the entire county owned property noted in the 1850 census. 22 of these were male and 4 were female. 97% of African-American female householders and 94% of African-American male heads therefore appeared with no listed property. African-American female heads of household were therefore even less likely to hold any property than male heads of the same race. Among African-American heads of household who did own property, female heads of household averaged \$250, less than half of the average propertied male's \$558. Like free African-American women in Loudoun, they had to get by on less.

Stevenson (1996:307–308) attributes higher rates of female householdership among free African Americans, compared to whites, in antebellum Loudoun to delays of marriage by men not financially ready to support families, who nonetheless fathered children with girlfriends; to distaste among free women of color for living with enslaved husbands on a master's property; and to legacies of matrilineal and matrilocal culture introduced by slavery. With respect to Talbot County, these explanations all seem possible for the parallel trends in householder sex to what Stevenson saw in Loudoun. As I have already described, the data for Talbot County corroborate later marriage ages among African American residents than white residents in the nineteenth century. In addition, the exceptionally high rate of female householdership in Easton in the nineteenth century invites the possibility that some of the statistic is accounted for by the absence of men who are out working in the fields or other places. Some free African-American men did marry in their twenties but this is precisely the age at which many lived away from their families while working (See Figures 1.14–1.16). Married or not, they would have been counted where they lived and worked, while married women living in town with absent husbands would appear in the census as heads of household. The second driving force, that of living

independently from slaveowners, disappeared by 1870. Yet, the lingering racial disparity in female-headed households suggests that the lingering cultural impact that Stevenson identifies may hold a certain amount of truth for free African Americans in Talbot County from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Whatever the cause, female heads of household played a large role in free African-American communities in Talbot County, particularly in Easton, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### *Parental mortality*

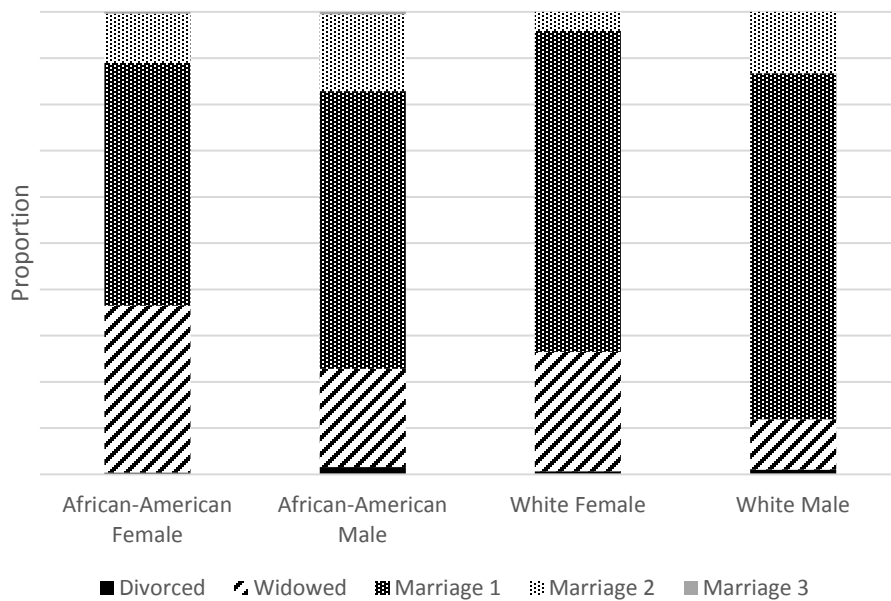
African-American families in Easton also struggled in holding families together because of higher rates of premature death. The 1910 census provides a snapshot of parental mortality for the early twentieth century and also contains some clues to the realities of the community's dealings with spousal mortality in the late nineteenth century. It recorded individuals' marital status as single, married, widowed, and divorced. It also noted whether married people were currently in their first, second, or third marriage. If we exclude single people, the remaining population paints a picture of the married and formerly married population.

Marriage in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Easton tended to end in the death of one or both of the partners. Divorce was extremely uncommon, though it did occur. Divorcees who were not remarried made up less than one half of a percent of Easton's 1910 population, whereas widows and widowers made up 11%. Therefore, death of a spouse overwhelmingly accounted for the end of a marriage.

African-American residents were far more likely than white residents to lose a spouse.

Combining the number of widowed and remarried people gives an estimate of the number of

people whose first marriages had ended, the great majority of whom had experienced the death of a spouse. This population accounted for 48% of adult African-American women, 40% of adult African-American men, 31% of adult white women and 25% of adult white men. Regardless of race, women were more likely to lose a husband than men were to lose a wife. However, the racial disparity in these figures is far greater than the sex disparity. 23% of African-American adults were widowed (male and female), versus only 14% of white adults. Married African Americans were almost twice as likely as married white residents to be on their second marriage (19% and 10% of married population, respectively). African-American women were therefore the largest group who had lost a spouse, experiencing spousal death at rates higher than both white women and African-American men.



**Figure 1.8:** Distribution of married and formerly married adults, 1910 Easton. Marriages among African Americans tended to last for shorter periods than white marriages. Although divorce was more common among African-American men than white men, it accounted for a small percentage of marriage terminations. Rather, African Americans could expect a greater likelihood that they might outlive their spouse for a longer period of time.

Men and women who had outlived their first partner often remarried. The ratio of the number of individuals in their second or third marriage to the number of those who remained unmarried widows and widowers or divorcees illustrates the relative ease or difficulty with which individuals found a new spouse. White men remarried at the highest rates, with the only remarried population that exceeded the number who were widowed or divorced. African-American men followed. 43% of formerly married African-American men were remarried. African-American women remarried at just over half that rate: 23%. Formerly married white women remarried at the lowest rate. Only 13% of formerly married white women were remarried at the time of the census.

Many of those who remained unmarried widows and widowers in 1910 may eventually have remarried. However, for all demographics, the average age of widows and widowers exceeded the average age of those who had remarried. Therefore, Easton residents were more likely to remarry if they lost a spouse at a younger age and less likely to do so if they lost their

**Table 1.14: Age Distribution of Widows and Widowers, 1910 Easton**

Age Cohort	African-American			White		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
20 to 29	4.55%	2.44%	3.88%	1.27%	0.00%	0.95%
30 to 39	20.45%	9.76%	17.05%	4.46%	9.26%	5.69%
40 to 49	19.32%	24.39%	20.93%	21.02%	18.52%	20.38%
50 to 59	18.18%	19.51%	18.60%	19.75%	14.81%	18.48%
60 to 69	15.91%	14.63%	15.50%	28.03%	20.37%	26.07%
70 to 79	11.36%	26.83%	16.28%	17.83%	25.93%	19.91%
80 to 89	6.82%	2.44%	5.43%	7.01%	9.26%	7.58%
90 to 99	2.27%	0.00%	1.55%	0.64%	1.85%	0.95%
100	1.14%	0.00%	0.78%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Further breaking down the ages of widows and widowers in Figure 1.7 demonstrates that African Americans who had outlived their spouse and remained unmarried tended to be younger than their white neighbors in similar situations. The percentages of widows and widowers in their 40s and 50s were similar between both races, but the remaining distribution of widows and widowers skews younger among African Americans and older among whites.

spouse later in life. Further breaking down the ages of widows and widowers also reveals something of the nature of spousal death.

In general, the ages of widows and widowers among African Americans skew younger than the ages of white widows and widowers. African-Americans who had lost their spouse were 3% more likely to be in their 20s and 9% more likely to be in their 30s than white adults in the same position. Therefore, African Americans were not only more likely to lose a spouse and remain unmarried but also more likely to be younger when this occurred. Interestingly, the first big bulge in African-American widowhood occurred among women in their 30s. White widows were 16% less likely to be in this age group. This bulge suggests the strong influence of work-related accidents among African-American men. The confluence of these statistics presents somewhat of a dilemma. African-American women were more likely to be widowed at younger ages. Younger widows were more likely to remarry. Judging by these two trends, Widowed African-American women should have been more likely to remarry. Instead, they ranked third in that regard.

Much of the life experience that produced these statistics in 1910 took place in the late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, census data on spousal death, widowhood, and remarriage are not available for the nineteenth century. If these disparities from the early twentieth century also characterized the previous century, then they would help to explain the high rate of female-headed households among free African Americans. Experiencing the highest rate of spousal death and facing the second lowest rate of remarriage placed tremendous burdens on African-American women: responsibilities to support themselves and their families while still striving to provide nurturing upbringings for their children, all while dealing with the emotional toll of

losing their partners. African-American fathers who became widowers experienced some of these trials as well, though less often, statistically.

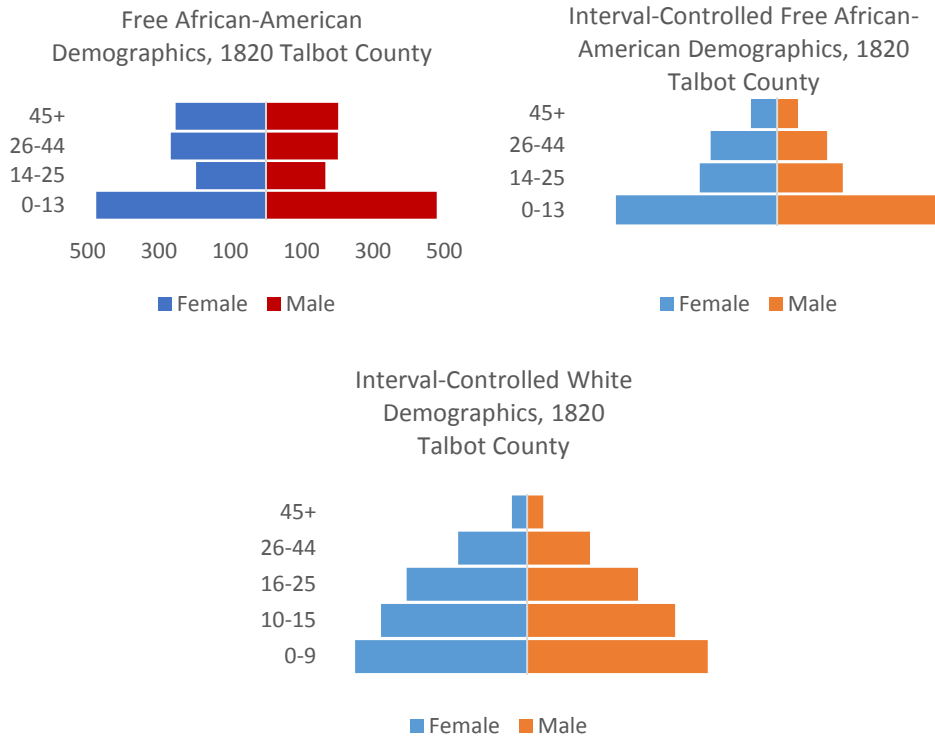
### *Child mortality*

Free African Americans also experienced disproportionately high rates of child mortality throughout the study period from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth. Because the census provides a snapshot only of the population every ten years, the rates of childhood mortality may be approximated using the relative sizes of age cohorts. The shape of demographic plots of a population by age and sex indicates something of the experiences of a population. Barring immigration and emigration, in a theoretically ideal laboratory population, plots tend to be pyramidal, with the shape of the pyramid determined by birth rates at the bottom of the chart and by death rates going thence upward. In real populations, deviations from this pyramidal structure and alterations to its slope indicate significant events or circumstances affecting the population.<sup>18</sup>

In the free African-American population of Talbot County in 1820, repeated decreases at every level of the pyramid structure of the chart indicate consistent die-off among the population in every age group for both sexes. The largest decrease takes place between the 0–13 and 14–25 age cohorts, where the numbers for both sexes approximately halve. The white population does not demonstrate this drastic disparity between the number of children and the number of young

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<sup>18</sup> Comparing age cohorts directly from the 1820 and 1830 population counts is difficult because the intervals separating the age brackets are not equal in length. These discrepancies inflate the apparent ratios between the age cohorts. Therefore, a more straightforward visual comparison may be made when the count of individuals in each age group is divided by the number of years that the age group contains. Thus, the intervals between the groups may be controlled. The resulting numbers do not represent actual population counts but do provide relative comparisons between groups by age and by sex.



**Figure 1.9:** Free African-American and white demographics in Talbot County, 1820. Controlling for variation in the size of 1820 census age cohorts enables a comparison of the structure of the white and free African-American populations by age, sex, and race. In the interval-controlled charts, the number of people in each cohort is no longer an accurate number; however, the overall shape of the population’s age groups becomes apparent. The tremendous size of the population of free African-American children would, in a modern population, signify a baby boom and set the stage for tremendous population growth. The fact that this did not occur suggests considerable mortality among African-American children.

adults. The large number of children among Talbot County free people of color suggests two possible scenarios. The first is that free black mothers had tremendous fertility and that the population would rapidly expand. Because the total numbers of free people of color in Talbot County grew very slowly during this period, a baby boom is unlikely. The second scenario is that the free African-American population experienced tremendous child mortality in which the white population did not share. Populations with high levels of child mortality must have higher fertility rates in order to compensate for this mortality or they will diminish over time. It is not likely that the large number of children reflects a surge in manumissions that added large

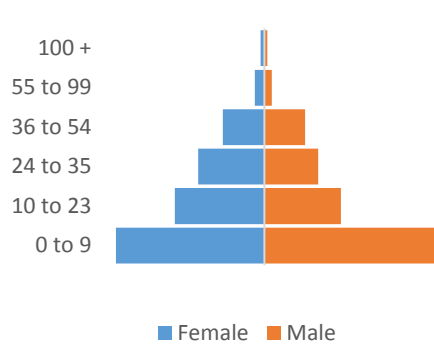
numbers of children to the population. When slave-owners manumitted younger slaves, they often waited until the child was an adult before granting freedom. This was seen as a kinder form of emancipation rather than thrusting a child into the world to fend for itself. An example of this can be seen in the will of Jeremiah Banning, who directed the several underage enslaved people he owned to be apprenticed or to be freed only upon reaching their majority (Banning 1932). Therefore, high child mortality remains the most likely explanation for the shape of Talbot County free African-American demographics in 1820. Since most free African Americans in this period occupied a relatively low socio-economic position, malnutrition and insufficient access to medicines likely contributed to the deaths of one out of two children before age 14.

The intervals used to differentiate the populations by age, themselves, indicate something of the difficulties that free people of color faced in securing their status and building lives for themselves. In differentiating the free African-American population along the lines of age, the 1820 census used the same age intervals as those demarcating the enslaved population; the age intervals for the white population were different below the age of 26 and included a more slightly more fine-grained sorting of the population. The government repeated this practice in 1830 and 1840 before beginning, in 1850, to list individuals—rather than totaling the number within households—and their exact ages. The United States Government thereby suggested that, although legally and for the purposes of governance a separate category, free black people were to be treated more like those who were enslaved than like other free people who happened to have been born white.

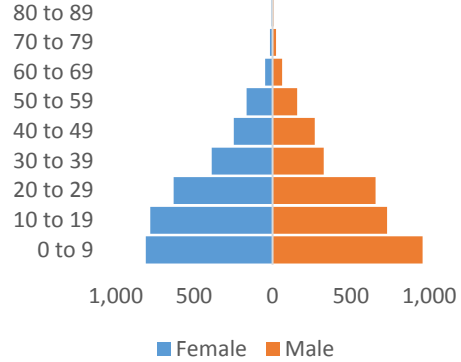


**Figure 1.10**

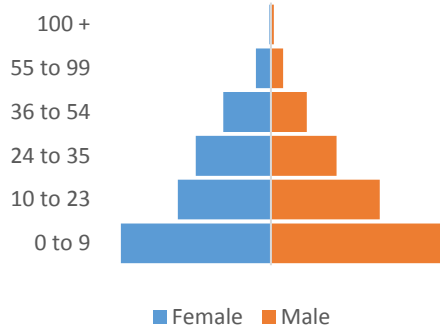
Interval-Controlled Free African-American Demographics, 1830  
Talbot County



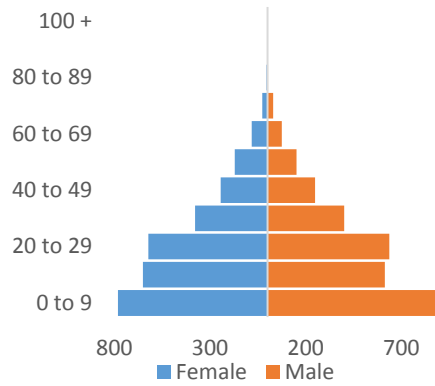
White Demographics, 1830  
Talbot County



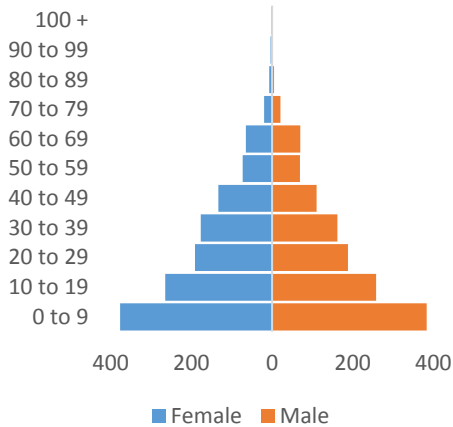
Interval-Controlled Free African-American Demographics, 1840  
Talbot County



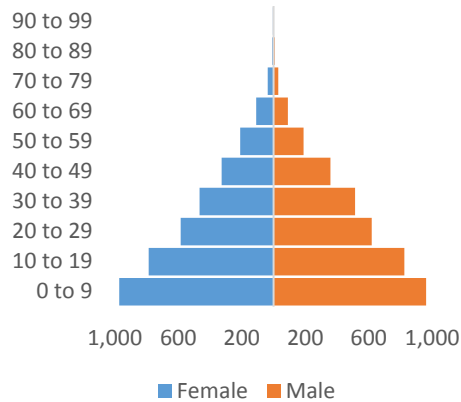
White Demographics, 1840  
Talbot County

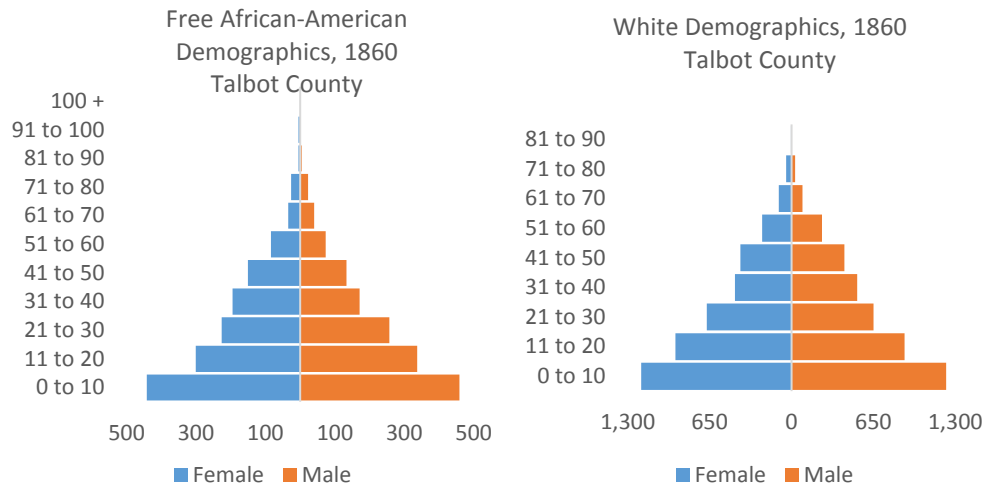


Free African-American Demographics, 1850  
Talbot County



White Demographics, 1850  
Talbot County





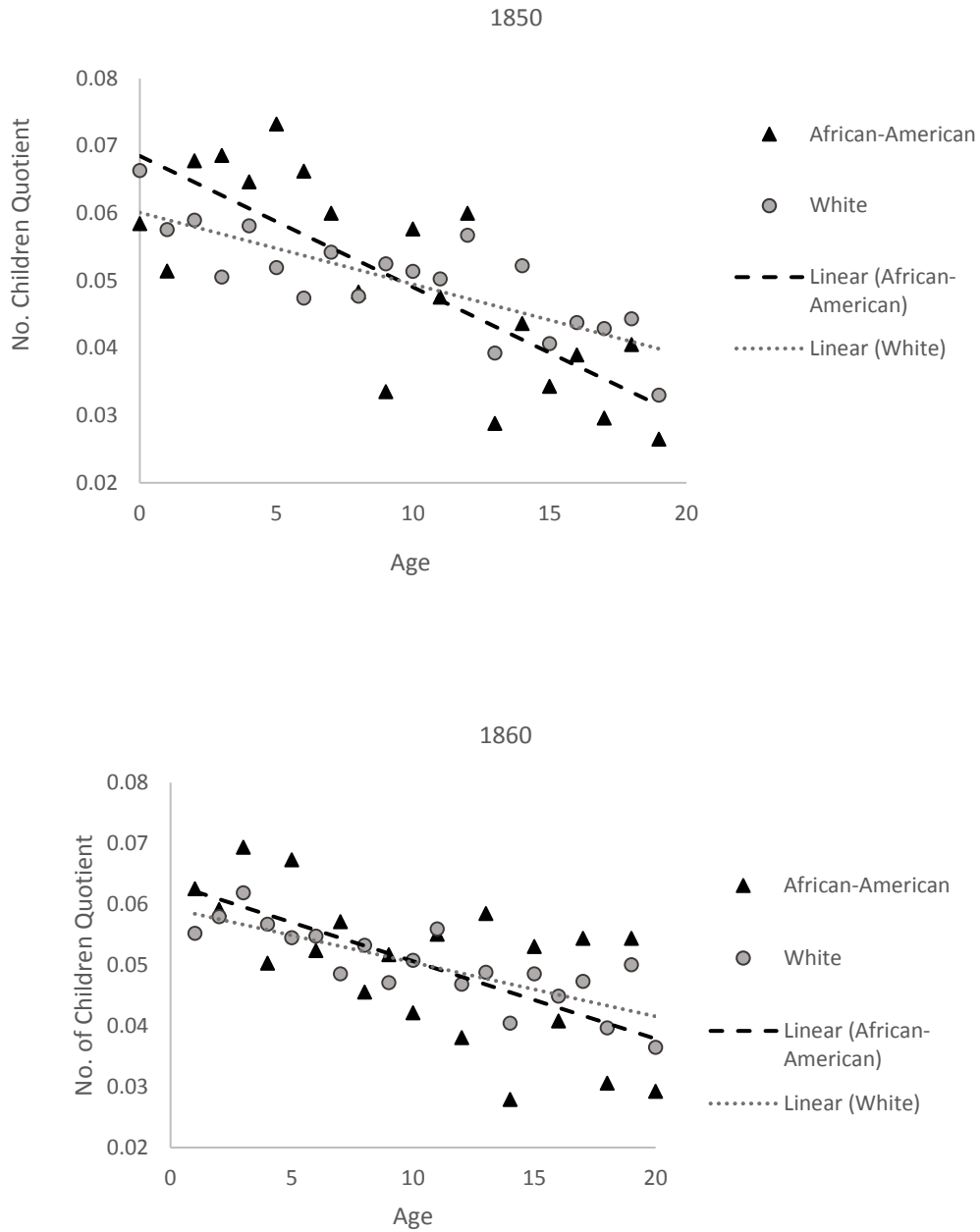
Comparison of free African-American and white demographics in Talbot County, 1830–1860. Demographics here for 1840 are based on the incomplete transcription of the 1840 census in the hope that the size of the data set overcomes the loss of data; exact numbers may change if a complete and accurate transcription can be made. As in Figure 1.9, the interval-controlled charts for 1830 and 1840 are not labeled along their x axis because the calculation of this control distorts the number of people in each cohort in order to conserve a visual representation of the cohorts' relative sizes.

Free people of color in 1830 and 1840 continued to experience high rates of child mortality in which their white neighbors did not share. Children reaching age 10 survived at relatively stable rates that mirrored the survival rates in the white population and those of 1820. However, those below age 10 remained at elevated risk of premature death. By 1840, the disparity between the first and second cohorts was shrinking. Child mortality appears to have improved somewhat. However, it still remained greater among the free African-American population than among the white population.

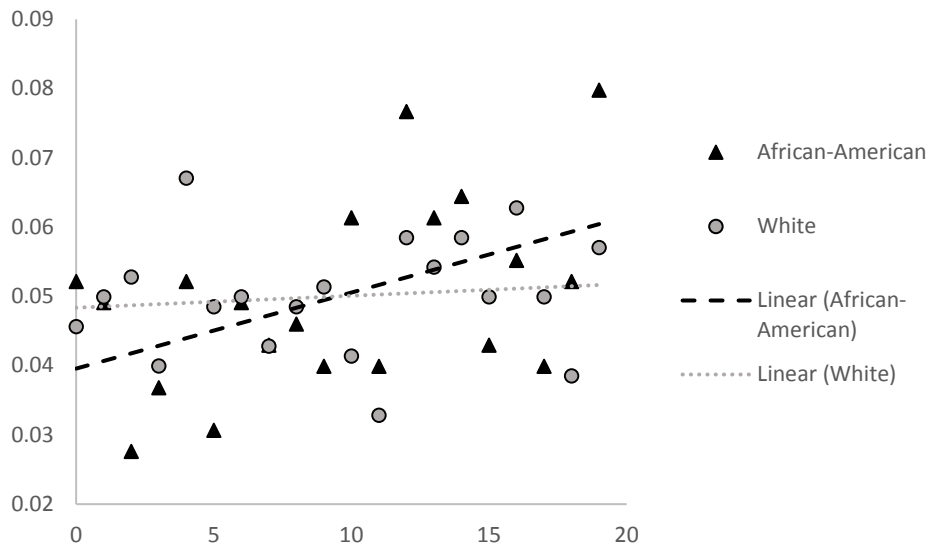
The recording of specific ages of individuals in 1850 makes a more detailed analysis of child mortality possible than could be performed for earlier decades. In order to directly compare child mortality between the two populations, it is necessary to calibrate the number of children of each age by the size of the population. This is because larger populations, such as the white population in Talbot County, will have greater gross rates of decline per year than smaller populations like the population of free African Americans even when the rates of decline are

equal with regard to the populations' size. Therefore, the number of children quotient in figure 1.11 counts the number of children in each age, divided by the total number of children below age 20 for both the African-American and the white populations. The resulting quotient brings both child populations into the same range and enables direct comparison of the numbers of children at each age. There is some variation in the number of children born each year, so the population decline is best represented as the trend within a scatter plot. In this way, it becomes clear that free African-American children died at rates that exceeded those of white children. Childhood mortality appears to have been spread out throughout the years below age 20. Because the individual and age breakdown of the 1850 census data enable the first detailed look at the demographics that reflect childhood mortality, it becomes possible to compare the rate of decrease throughout the younger ages. Infant mortality might be expected to play a significant role in child mortality. However, death does not appear to have been more common below age 3 than at other ages. Such a circumstance would manifest as a greater number of infants and toddlers than children of other ages and this was not the case. It is possible that the variation in number of births per year in such a small population makes mortality at specific ages more difficult to track. Certainly, the numbers for African-American children at particular ages stray further from the trend line than the numbers for white children do. However, the available data from the census suggest no particular portion of childhood during which death was more likely— for either African-American or white children.

In 1910, in Easton, migration of families into the town distorts the distributions of children according to their ages. However, the census in that year provides direct data on child deaths without the necessity of assuming that declines on population are caused mainly by death.



**Figure 1.11:** Number of Children of Each Age by Race, when Controlled for Population Size, 1850 and 1860 Talbot County. Downward slopes of both lines represent child mortality. African Americans experienced this trauma at a steeper rate than did European Americans. Over the course of the 1850s, child mortality improved, particularly for African Americans, approaching parity with their white neighbors.



**Figure 1.12:** Number of Children of Each Age by Race, when Controlled for Population Size, 1910 Easton. Larger numbers of older children in both white and African-American families in Easton in 1910 suggests either rapidly decreasing birth rates or immigration.

The 1910 census recorded the number of children each adult woman had born and the number still living. Blanks probably indicate childless women because 0s were only used in cases involving likely errors. Although a curiously high proportion of women remained childless—68% of women in their 20s, for example and 29% of women in their 80s who had never born children—these numbers probably more accurately capture infant mortality than the earlier demographic pyramids. Of 678 women in 1910 Easton who had born children, 34% had outlived at least one child. This statistic holds within it a large racial disparity: 44% of African-American women had outlived a child, while only 31% of white women had done so.<sup>19</sup> The racial disparity is even greater when considering the proportions of children deceased. African-American women had outlived 41% of their children, compared to 24% for white women.

<sup>19</sup> Statistics for proportion of children living in the analysis here do not include two white women who were listed as having born 0 children, yet having one or more children living. In one of the two cases, the child living listed in the household as blood relations, not step- or adopted child. Therefore, these are errors in the original records and have been omitted from the following analyses.

Not all of these children's deaths necessarily took place during childhood. Older women were more likely to have lost a child, but childhood mortality may be unrelated to this statistic for older women. Therefore, in order to assess children's deaths, the survival rates of children for women in their 20s and 30s are most relevant. Only 253 (45%) Easton women in their 20s and 30s had given birth. Within this group, 49% of African-American women and 32% of white women had lost at least one child. Therefore, mortality of children among active mothers was high and hit African-American women and their families harder, just as it had in the previous century. In their 30s, African-American women could expect to have become mothers, as three quarters of them did, to have born an average of four children, and to have buried one of them.

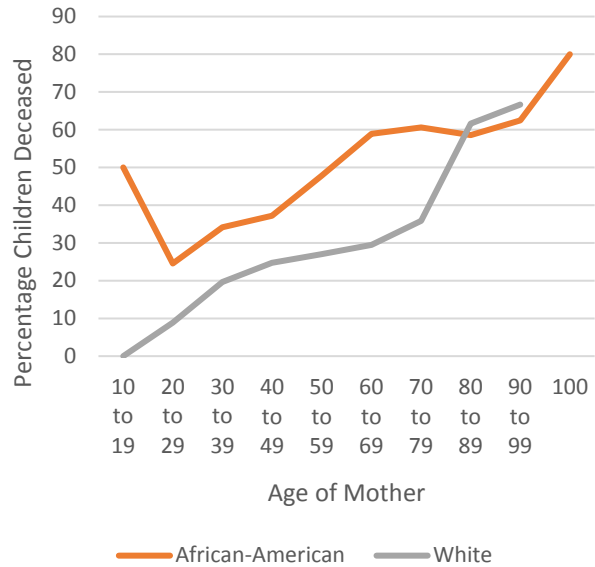
Taking only the African-American children born to mothers below age 40—that is, children who can be assumed to be below age 20 because motherhood before age 20 was uncommon in this population—this approach accounts for 264 children born. Of these, 168 were still living. Therefore, there was a 36% mortality rate among African-American children, using this metric. In comparison, only 18% of white children had died. African-American children were twice as likely as white children to lose a sibling or friend in childhood.

It is not possible to assess the personal emotional or social experience of child mortality for mothers and fathers through census data alone. Demographic statistics do not fully grasp the emotional toll of this experience, the impact of a woman's success at childrearing or lack thereof on her position and respect among her community, or other ramifications. Moreover, the average numbers of children born and living are subject to the number of children a woman bore: a woman who bore two and lost one child experienced the same child mortality rate as one who bore four and lost two. The average woman's experience of child mortality may therefore be represented by the average of the individual child mortality rates for adult women. Whether the

mother who loses one out of two children or the one who loses two out of four experiences more emotional distress is not a question the statistics can answer and is probably not a useful question. However, the metric enables some comparisons.

Across all age groups, the average African-American mother lost a higher proportion of her children than the average white mother. The charted lines only cross in older cohorts where childhood death is not as relevant and where the sample size diminishes to the point where comparison is not reliable. The greatest disparity occurred among teenaged mothers. However, here the sample size is also extremely small and the comparison may not be numerically reliable. The average African-American woman in her twenties experienced twice the rate of child mortality as the average white woman, which is consistent with the rate of child death explored previously.

The closer look at the 1910 census afforded by the new data categories demonstrates that African Americans in Easton continued to experience disproportionately high rates of child mortality in the early twentieth century, as they had in the nineteenth.



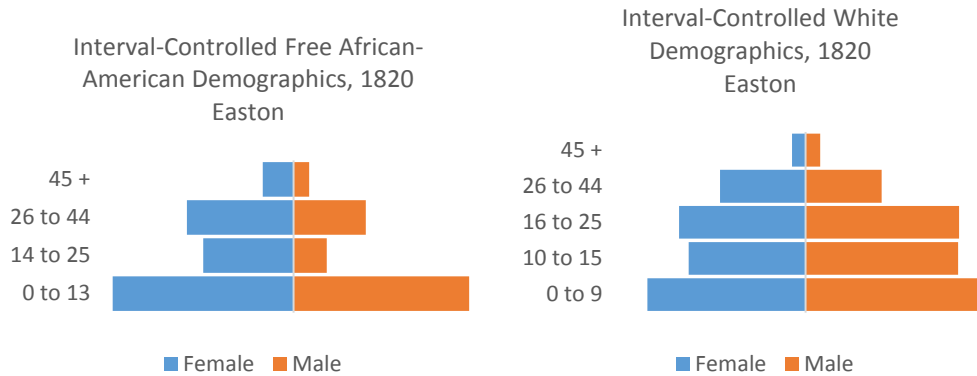
**Figure 1.13:** Child Mortality Experienced by the Average Mother in 1910 Easton. The spike in child mortality among the youngest African Americans is the product of excessively small sample size and can be dismissed. Throughout most of their lives, African-American women experienced significantly higher rates of child mortality than did white women. Their experiences only converge among the oldest women, who, if they lived into their 80s, had most likely outlived some of their children by the nature of their longevity, which overpowered other factors.

*Absence of children: forced apprenticeship*

In addition to higher child mortality rates, free African-American women were not always able to raise the children that they bore to adulthood even when those children survived. The practice of gifting or selling enslaved children from their enslaved mothers is well-documented throughout the nineteenth-century South and the stark image of slaveowners tearing a weeping child from the arms of its grief-stricken mother has become one of the defining icons of slavery's inhumanity. Although freedom afforded African Americans greater power over their family lives, localities sometimes maintained statutes that required free black families of a certain level of poverty to apprentice out their children. The ostensible logic behind these statutes was that they prevented poor families from becoming a burden on society. However, this practice discriminately targeted families of color, particularly the poorer, working-class majority of free African Americans.

The impact of this invasion into free black families can be seen in the demographic age profiles of Easton's free African-Americans living in Easton in the nineteenth century. In 1820, the sex and age breakdown for Easton's free African-American population roughly pyramidal in shape, with indications of high child mortality. However, there are a significant number of people, especially males, aged 14 to 25 who appear to be missing. There are slight dents in the pyramidal structure of the white population in the 10–15 age group, but they are not nearly as great as the gap in the free African-American population. Since people tended to enter their working years in their teens and twenties and may not have started families, this is the most mobile segment of the population. It is likely that some of these individuals left Easton to find





**Figure 1.14:** Comparison of free African-American and white demographics in Easton, 1820. The two main differences between the demographic pyramids of these two populations are the faster rate of mortality among African Americans as indicated by the more rapid overall rate of decline in their numbers and the large number of African Americans aged 14–25, particularly males, that is missing.

apprenticeships or work, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes under court order. They may have gone to other parts of the county or the region or to Baltimore, Annapolis, or other cities. However, a large portion appear to remain in Talbot County. This is the case because males aged 14 to 25 constitute the largest missing component in the Easton African-American population and make up the only segment of the population within the remainder of the county’s free African-American population in which males outnumber females. Therefore, a good many of Easton’s young men at the time of the 1820 census may have been found working in other parts of Talbot County. The census instructions to marshals in that year were to count people where they were found, not where they called home (Gauthier 2002:6). Some workers moved with the seasonality of work. However, assessing the impact of this mobility on the demographic trends that the census reflects is difficult. The census was to begin on August 7, but the manuscript available to me is dated January 9<sup>th</sup> (USDS 1820). The census of the whole of the county could not have taken place in January 9<sup>th</sup>, as the dates on the manuscript suggest, so it must be a copy and the census was taken sometime between these two dates. Regardless,

the census indicates that many older children and young adults left Easton either seasonally or full-time. Free adolescents of color did so at vastly greater rates than did white adolescents.

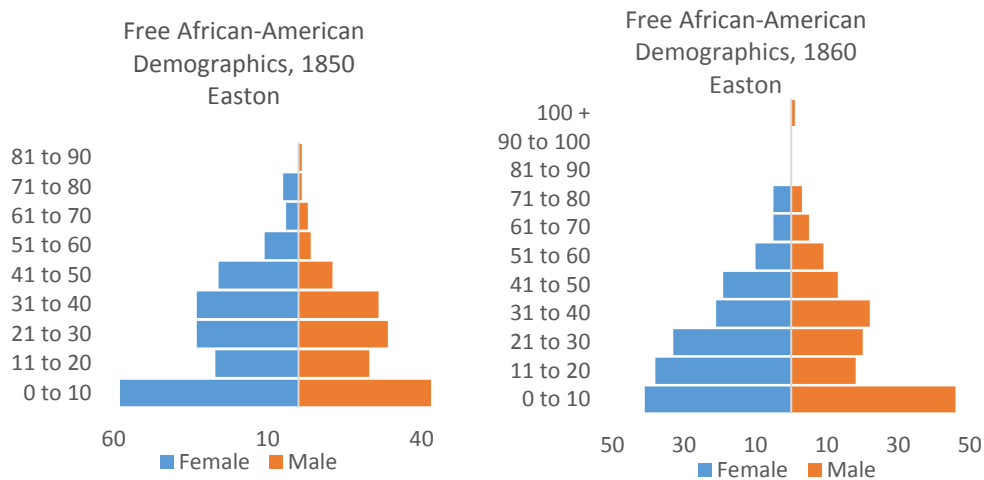
Leaving Easton for work was not always a choice that young free black men and women made for themselves. Many of these young adults may have found themselves bound out for a term of service. Girls under the age of 16 and boys under age 21, if not supported by their parents, were apprenticed out for a term of service. Talbot County required this of both white and nonwhite residents so that indigent children would not become a burden on the county. There was more work available for apprentices outside of Easton than inside it, though the town did offer some opportunities for apprenticed girls to work as domestic servants (Schmidt personal communication February 11, 2019). The large and approximately equal numbers of boys and girls below age 14 suggests that these youngest children were bound out as apprentices at far lower rates than those in their teenage years. The absence in the white population was very limited, representing the wealth disparity between African Americans and whites, who were better able to afford the care and support of their children. In addition, when they did have to apprentice them, white families may have been better able to find their children work nearer to home.

Such apprenticeships subjected children to a form of temporary bondage and took them from their parents. If free African-American parents were able to spend more time with their youngest children before, often, being forced to apprentice their older children, they then managed to spend crucial formative years building bonds and instilling values in their young ones. Yet, these parents would have faced greater difficulty in being present with their teenaged children to bring them into adulthood. That the adult free African-American population from age 26 upward resumes a normal demographic pyramidal shape indicates that many of these

younger adults either working freely or bound out beyond the limits of the town returned later to Easton.

Upon closer inspection, the shape of Easton’s free black population in 1850 looked much as it had in 1820, when demographic breakdowns were last available. The population continued to skew toward females and to have large cohorts of children and adults. These data suggest that free black teenagers still often were bound out for apprenticeships that took them outside of town and away from their families.

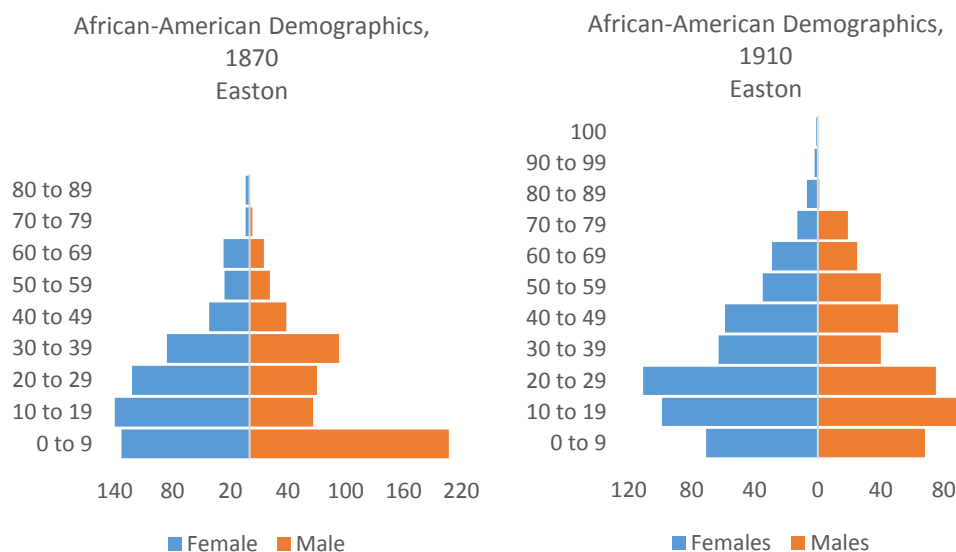
By 1860, the departure of Easton’s young black people had become greatly gendered. While large numbers of boys and young men are absent in the population in town, the numbers of girls and young women show no such absence. The sex ratios in these younger middle cohorts depart significantly from those of the preceding decades, in which both sexes demonstrate this age-specific absence. Among males, the absence grew to affect a greater number of age cohorts. The youngest of these were most likely bound out and the oldest working elsewhere. This sex shift meant that teenage girls and women played a much larger role



**Figure 1.15:** Absence of young adults in Easton’s free African-American population, 1850 and 1860. The shape of the absence of people in their teens and twenties changed over time. In 1850, it was more evenly balanced by sex. In 1860, it impacted almost exclusively males.

in Easton’s free African-American community and their contributions greatly shaped the social life and the culture of the community.

This trend continued after the Civil War for a period of time. In 1870<sup>20</sup>, the demographic profile matches closely with that of 1860: large absences among males aged 11 to 30 with apparent return of adult men in their thirties. By the early twentieth century, the practice largely ended. In 1910, Easton’s African-American population skewed female in most age groups, including the teens and twenties. However, the smaller numbers of males in in these two cohorts were not the massive gaps of the previous century. Nevertheless, the shortage of men in their thirties suggests a remnant impact of more than half of Easton’s young adult African-American



**Figure 1.16:** Absence of young adults in Easton’s free African-American population, 1870 and 1910. The demographic pyramid for Easton’s free African-American population in 1870 greatly resembles that in 1860, with its notable absence of men in their teens and twenties. By the early twentieth century, this absence has mostly disappeared from those age cohorts, though its echoes can be seen in the 30s age group.

<sup>20</sup> The demographic breakdown presented here relies on transcripts of the Easton section of the 1870 census from FamilySearch (USDI 1870). However, the transcript numbers do not match those from the 1870 summary produced by the Bureau of the Census (USDI 1872). Therefore, analysis of the age and sex trends here must allow for a degree of skepticism.

population vacating the town a generation previously. In the nineteenth century, cohorts aged thirty and above were replenished by influxes of new or returning adults. However, in the midst of a general decline in the African-American population during the early twentieth century, the last generation that left appears not to have returned.

The emerging image of growing up free and African-American in nineteenth-century Talbot County is that, just when the perils of young childhood might seem to be past, children could find themselves sent away to apprenticeships. The practice was not restricted to Easton; the same gaps do not appear in county-wide demographics because most free people of color who were apprenticed were apprenticed within the county. Not all free black children were taken from their families. But for those who were, and for their relatives, the separation significantly hampered the maintenance of nuclear family bonds and free African-American parents' control over their adolescent children's maturity into adulthood.

### *Family life in the twentieth century*

The struggles in maintaining family integrity in the face of mortality and the departure of both adults and children for work followed Easton's African-American residents into the twentieth century. Much of the trends above can be connected to endemic poverty and racism. Along with these realities came the need to work together to raise each generation and a community spirit that rose to the occasion. Oral history interviews with older residents in 2014 illustrate this character of growing up in the community.

Dana Gibson recalled a tremendous sense of community and the involvement of many hands in bringing him up:<sup>21</sup>

All I knew was the people around and you know back then when I was coming up the whole community raised you, you know, and um... [interviewer: "Mhm, takes a village to raise a child." ] ...Yeah. And they did. They didn't mind cuttin' your butt, and then calling home and telling your parents so that you get it twice. So um I was just blessed to be brought up in that time, cuz um, different people teach you different things. And I was a person who hung around older people, I wasn't a person that hung around young people. You learn a lot. Nowadays kids don't listen to older people at all, but you learn a lot listening to older people. Cuz my uncle, Mr. Barney he's my uncle, he taught me a lot too.

...  
We all lived here; my aunt lived down the street, another aunt lived across the street, and we lived there, and they used to holler across the street to each other. That didn't make sense to me when you could just walk down the street. But they used to holler.

...  
What I loved about it was, kids from Graham street, kids from all over used to come and we used to play together. Wasn't no fightin' or carryin' on. You might had a argument, little pushin' or whatever. But we used to play marbles; draw a circle in the dirt you know, bam. People don't even know what marbles are now. They don't know what jacks are, you know we used to play jacks. Hopscotch, Mother May I, all that. Then, and hide and seek, now they play hide and go get it, what kinda stuff is that? Hide and go get it, for real? But uh, it was just nice growin' on The Hill. But we ain't have school buses. Group of us just walked to school.

...  
People just looked out for you, the whole community looked out for you. Don't think you goin to another part and think you gon' do somethin. By the time you get home, Um where you been? Such and such place. What you do over there? Nothin I ain't do nothin. And you know you just layed that woman out across that street, and you know she called home and you got a whip.

Nellie Sullivan, who grew up on Port Street, in The Bottom, after moving there in 1936 at age 7, recalls playing mostly with her own siblings. "Parents didn't allow you to play with other chillun because they had so many of their own they tell you, 'Let them go home and you stay home. But, as a young adult, Sullivan was dragged to her first church service at Bethel A.M.E. by a landlady after a particularly late night out dancing. And when it came time to raise her own children, Sullivan acknowledged it was a relief to be able to lean on her neighbors. Sullivan

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<sup>21</sup> Interviewed by A.A., transcribed by Simone Durham.

raised children on The Hill in the 1950s after marrying and moving in with her husband following his service in the second world war.

When I show you where I lived at, it's a space in-between. There's nothin' but just open and green grass. There's a house over on that corner there, a man named Mr. McKeys...and if the chillen played in that lot, I can go in the house and do anything I wanted to. 'Cause he called hisself Uncle Mickey. And if they looked like they was comin' near that road, he'd get up with that little switch and say, "You better not come outta that yard. Uncle Mickey come over there and cut your little backsides' and they'd run right back outta the yard. So, see, I didn't have to worry about that.

Carlene Phoenix grew up in The Bottom a generation behind Nellie Sullivan. Her uncle lived on The Hill and she visited it often. She describes the efforts to which some of the community went to know their neighbors:

This was a community where everybody knew everybody...If the elders didn't know you by name, they knew who your parents were and they would call you out—you know—many times when they said, 'You're Sonny Deshields' daughter.' And, of course, the churches were very active. I mean, as children, we did a lot in the churches. We were always doin' somethin' in the church. But it was a sense of community. I can remember Christmas time—it was the best Christmases I ever had because this was the time when people—your door was always open and somebody was always—especially in our house—was always in our house and, you know, we'd get our little nickels and dimes and quarters for Christmas presents and...I miss those times because we don't have that anymore...At my house, my father would *always* welcome anybody new in the community. If he knew somebody was new in the community, they'd be sittin' at our dinner table havin' dinner. And that's the way we had everything in the community...gay men, gay women...police officers...But it was a sense of family.

...  
We came here after school, played games...we's here for the church. We came because we had relatives here and—and friends that we played with here, so...it was a great place to visit. It was a great place to hang out. And no matter even if I didn't live here, I had—it was family. Because it didn't matter where you lived. People respected you and treated you—that's the one thing that's missing—they treated you like you were family whether you were biological or not.

The sense of community that these current residents describe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries extended back throughout the history of Easton's free African-American population centered on and around The Hill. People worked together and supported each other—and, in many ways, they did so because they had to. While slavery continued, it

perpetuated physical divisions between family members who were free and those who were not. Poverty and lack of opportunity plagued early free African-American families, impacting on the timing of their marriages, the numbers of children they bore, and the numbers of those children that survived to adulthood. During the nineteenth century, African-American parents even struggled to retain authority in raising their children who survived. In the face of all these obstacles, African-American families reached across the generations and between households to support one another. Women played key roles in these efforts and nowhere did they do so more than in the raising of children.



## Chapter 2

### **Growing Up in Easton's Free African-American Community: Toys and the Moral Order of the Emerging Black Middle Class**

In order to preserve the community through the generations and to improve the community's economic and social standing, free African Americans in Easton paid close attention to how they raised their children. The lessons they instilled in each generation of youngsters served to create and sustain a community culture that provided support for individuals and families amidst a social landscape of slavery and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racism. Free African Americans living on and around The Hill took part in broader discourses on household structure, domestic relationships, and family values at the national level among the emerging American black middle classes. Unfortunately, African-American working-class families of the period do not leave as rich a written record of their views on childrearing, so this chapter will focus mainly on the attitudes, values, and practices of the free black middle class.

The conversations in African-American newspapers of the period introduced young boys to the importance of individuality and personal skill in a world driven by competition. Writers advised boys to devote themselves to serious endeavors like school and church but to remember time for play, to be honest and generous, and to avoid gambling. For girls, these authors focused on building positive social relationships, encouraging sisterliness, friendliness, respect, sharing, and creative playfulness. They also prepared girls for domestic duties by emphasizing care for others and the importance of taking on responsibility in the household. These discourses took particular shape in local communities like Easton in accordance with the particular cultural and social geography, including a community's own class structure, available work, church activities,

and literacy within and among households. Toys provide a valuable window into the lives of children. The marbles and toy tea sets excavated from sites on The Hill and the written discourses about these toys in African-American newspapers demonstrate these different ways in which middle-class African-Americans prepared their sons and daughters for life in Easton, and America more broadly, and brought them into the struggle for freedom and equality.

Erika Ball (2012) has explored the national discourse among the nineteenth-century black middle classes on domestic relations through newspaper articles and stories, sermons, ex-slave narratives, and other sources. Nationally, African American newspapers advised their readers to marry, and to select their partners well. Husbands were to avoid drink; wives were to be frugal, avoid gossip, and take care in the management of the household over their personal appearance (Ball 2012:87). Marriage, in the American political culture, enlarged the standing of the husband by attaching to him dependents (wife and children). If men were to be citizens, then women were to support them. Wives were called to defer to their husbands' authority and to manage the house frugally. They were to receive education in domestic economy and household tasks (Ball 2012:89–91). Wives were to provide counsel to their husbands and to encourage them to great deeds of bravery, patriotism, and sacrifice (Ball 2012:95). Men were expected to be hard-working and thrifty. They were to seek out and rely on the sound judgment of their wives in regard to domestic matters (Ball 2012:89). This literature placed the family and women's domestic influence at the core of antislavery. "To ensure that aspiring African Americans created ideal families and domestic spaces, black domestic writers urged free African Americans so create the ideal antislavery household by attending to their domestic duties and obligations as husbands and wives, actively employing female influence and thoroughly inculcating antislavery values in their children" (Ball 2012:84–85). "Once established, these stable and independent

households could play important roles for the northern black abolitionist community, serving as key forums for antislavery men and women to gather for abolitionist, literary, and vigilance committee meetings as well as serving as stops on the Underground Railroad” (Ball 2012:92). Children were to be raised in such a way as to prepare them to take up the struggle. The national domestic literature advised parents to make children no stranger to hard work, since economic freedom was essential to equality and laziness reflected badly on the entire community. Writers advocated against corporal punishment, preferring persuasion instead to encourage development of a good moral compass (Ball 2012:101–102). Common themes throughout this discourse included independence, frugality, hard work, and piety. Of course, the realities within middle-class African-American families did not necessarily match the ideals on the page. However, there was a clear and concerted effort to provide parents and other adults with some guidance on how to prepare children for lives that would contribute to their communities.

Many of the messages were similar to those aimed at white middle-class audiences and similarly emphasized the distinct, gendered public and private spheres that underpinned the cult of domesticity. However, for middle-class African Americans, there were additional nuances of meaning embedded. African-American writers placed tremendous emphasis on moral uprightness in order to achieve the respect of their white neighbors. African Americans faced, and still face, what Patrick Rael calls the “racial synecdoche”: that for minorities, the misdeeds of a few are used to attribute negative stereotypes to the whole group in a way that does not take place for white Americans. In the face of this, middle-class African Americans became vigilant about maintaining respectability and morality (Ball 2012:1). Some historians have drawn a distinction between moral uplift and more assertive black nationalism—the one aiming at gradual improvement of African-Americans’ station in society and the other demanding freedom

and equality now without any need to “prove” themselves. African Americans today still struggle to reconcile the moral demand that they be “twice as good” with the failed fruits of that labor (Coates 2015). However, when it came to family relationships and domestic structure, the two strategies intersected. Ball argues that these domestic ideals worked toward both goals at once:

African American writers urged elite and aspiring African Americans to engage in a deeply personal politics by fashioning themselves into ideal husbands and wives, mother, fathers, self-made men and transnational freedom fighters by committing themselves to living was former slave turned Congregationalist minister Samuel Ringgold Ward would call “an anti-slavery life” (Ball 2012:2).

Ultimately, these values defined the black middle class. The moral discourse of the conduct literature therefore included but also transcended self-improvement. African-American leaders wanted members of their communities to thoroughly transform themselves into agents for positive change. As Ball, puts, it, ideals about home, gender roles, and marriage placed “the free black family on the front lines of the antislavery campaign.” Correct conduct here supported black men’s actions in the political sphere, raised children to give of themselves for the cause, and turned to women’s domestic work as “a bulwark against the racism of the outside world and as the space to nurture appreciation for the personal politics involved in living an antislavery life” (Ball 2012:3–4).

Ball focuses most of her attention on spousal ideals and parenting. She discusses less what middle-class African America expected of children. She also focuses on the national discourse itself and does not pursue how these writings were received in local free African-American communities through the practice of reading aloud to children and through the material culture of childhood. Toys played particularly strong roles in passing on behavioral guidance to children. They made appearances in stories for children and thereby provided reference points for the young audience to access the moral messages written for them. They

also carried those messages, attached either consciously or subconsciously to them, into everyday play. The practices of reading to children and of play itself brought children into touch with this prescriptive literature and involved community networks in the work of positioning new generations to take up the struggle for freedom and equality. In order to explore childhood in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Easton's African-American community on The Hill, I investigate the meanings of two prominent classes of toys recovered archaeologically from excavations in the neighborhood: marbles and play tea sets. These meanings derive both from the immediate physical contexts in which the toys were found and from the discourses that surrounded them in the free black press, where toys made frequent appearances in African-American newspapers.

For access to the newspapers that free African-Americans in the nineteenth-century United States wrote, contributed to, and edited for themselves and for other free African Americans to read, I turned to Accessible Archives, a research database service, and their collection of African-American newspapers from the nineteenth century. This is a vast searchable database with comprehensive transcriptions of the articles in each issue as well as scans of the original documents.<sup>22</sup> These newspapers offer a glimpse into the conversations that

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<sup>22</sup> The database includes Samuel E. Cornish and John Brown Russworm's *Freedom's Journal* (New York, NY, 1827–1829), Phillip Bell's *The Weekly Advocate or Colored American* (New York, NY, 1837–1841) and , Frederick Douglass' *The North Star* (Rochester, NY, 1847–1851), Frederick Douglass' *Paper* (Rochester, NY, 1851–1860), Douglass' *Monthly* (Rochester, NY, 1859–1863) Mary Ann Carey and Samuel Ringgold Ward's *Provincial Freeman* (Chatham, Canada West—now Ontario—1854–1857), the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA, 1854–1856, 1861–1902), the New England Freedman's Aid Society's *Freedmen's Record* (Boston, MA, 1865–1874), *The Negro Business League Herald* (Washington, D.C., 1909–1909), and *The National Era* (Washington, D.C., 1847–1860). The *Christian Recorder* has continued until the present, but the database includes only issues through 1902.

Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of *The National Era* (Accessible Archives 2018), was a white abolitionist (USDS 1840c:216). The inclusion of this newspaper in the database is therefore somewhat questionable, though it may have had a significant African-American audience.

free African Americans had in the nineteenth century surrounding the raising of children and the meanings attached to the toys that we find archaeologically.

It is important to remember that it was primarily African Americans of the middle classes that took part in and shaped the discourses in nineteenth-century newspapers and other prescriptive literature. Middle-class free African Americans made up the majority of membership in nineteenth-century African-American fraternal societies and churches (Berlin 1974:313). When it came to the free black press, things were the same. Men and women of education and literacy, religious leaders, and those with more leisure time to become involved in social causes were mainly those who contributed their voices to these publications, on childrearing or any other matter. And they were more likely to access these publications, through greater literacy and by being able to afford subscription fees. More importantly, however, the moral discourses in the free black press and the culture of racial uplift that they represent must be viewed within the context of an emerging class-based society as the U.S. economy matured, with independence from Britain, that was placing on the new middle class new expectations of civic engagement, hard work, education, and moral uprightness (Rael 2002:5).

The newspapers therefore provide a record of middle-class African-American discourses and sentiments, though not necessarily those of working-class African Americans. As Ball argues, this was not a literature through which middle-class African Americans sought to reform lower-class free black behaviors. It was a black middle-class and elite discourse for the black middle class and elite, aimed at transforming themselves in public and in private (Ball 2012:6-8). It was totally central to their self-image as freedom fighters and their total dedication to the cause (Ball 2012:8).

Unfortunately, the latter leave far less by way of a written record and it is more difficult to assess their responses or alternatives to the ideas coming out of the black middle class. Nevertheless, the discourses in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers offer a glimpse into the conversations among one segment of the free African-American community on The Hill and nationally.

### Using Historical African-American Newspapers to Interpret the Material Culture of Childhood in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Easton

In order to interpret the cultural meanings attached to children's toys by turning to nineteenth-century African-American newspapers, I feel it necessary to first solidify the historical connection between the discourses in these pages and the free African Americans living in Easton. It is not sufficient, as has sometimes been done in studies of historical African-American life in Talbot County (Demczuck 2008:190), to use writings that originated hundreds of miles away in other localities in order to say something directly about the local culture of a community without first demonstrating—through subscriptions and locally-authored and locally relevant content—that local residents were aware of and engaged with these broader and more distant conversations for which we have a written record. It is acceptable to use such writings as theoretical lenses without the presence of these sorts of concrete connections but it is not justifiable to use them for specific cultural details unless such connections can be demonstrated. Luckily, for Easton, there is ample evidence that local African-American residents consumed and participated in these discourses. I ran a query in the database for “Easton,” which returned 516 results. After sifting through people with the last name Easton and references to Easton, Pennsylvania, the database presented a variety of connections between these publications and

Easton, Maryland. African Americans from Easton subscribed to African-American newspapers of the time and sometimes submitted content. The publications, in turn, printed news from and related to Easton. Key players in nineteenth-century free African-American discourse sometimes came and went from Easton. Altogether, there is ample evidence of involvement by African-American Eastoners in the free black press of the nineteenth century to underpin the use of these sources to interpret material culture from The Hill.

Easton residents appear in the subscription rolls for the *Christian Recorder* repeatedly from 1864 through 1898. On December 10, 1864, the *Christian Recorder* (1864a) acknowledged its sponsors, who were mainly African Methodist Episcopal ministers. Reverend G. M. Witten of Easton, who was most likely pastor of Bethel Church on Hanson Street at the time, sent \$2.50, which was the median level of support among those the paper acknowledged alongside him. The *Christian Recorder* sometimes published acknowledgements of church members who had worked hard to distribute the publication within their congregations. The editors called these lists the “Illustrious Roll Noble Workers” and described it this way: “The following brethren take the number of Recorders set opposite their names, and sell then at 5 cents a copy in their congregation. The amount of good they do in this manner is far more than they have any idea of. They have our heartfelt thanks. All honor to them” (*Christian Recorder* 1878b). On December 5, 1878, the Illustrious Roll acknowledged James T. Morris of Easton, who had sold 10 copies (*Christian Recorder* 1878b). On January 1, 1880, the again acknowledged Morris, this time describing him as a reverend, and noting that he had sold 5 copies (*Christian Recorder* 1880). It is unlikely that the *Recorder* acknowledged every single subscription and many others were probably not reported in the Illustrious Roll. Easton’s A.M.E. congregation at Bethel Church therefore had reliable access to the church’s publication. On March 31, 1898, the *Recorder*



reported the numbers of several subscriptions among congregations New Jersey to Bermuda. Reverend Richard Jackson of Easton, Maryland, topped the list, having “sent us a list of subscribers last week” (*Christian Recorder* 1898). The ministers of the local congregation thus played a large role in subscribing the congregation to the *Christian Recorder* but were not the publication’s only readers in Easton.

The *Christian Recorder* also published, on an ongoing basis, a list of the denomination’s financial supporters that it titled the “Roll of Usefulness and Honor.” This list promoted fundraising efforts by recognizing churches and their members by name who had raised and sent one dollar per member of the congregation. On February 6, 1873, this Roll included 19 members of Bethel Church in Easton, led by Pastor Arthur Jones (*Christian Recorder* 1873c). On July 4, 1878, it included seventeenth members and their pastor, Reverend A. Woodhouse, who together had collected \$30.72 (*Christian Recorder* 1878a). It is not entirely clear what to what purpose the church directed the funds associated with the Roll of Usefulness and Honor. Only occasionally did the accompanying text offer a description of the fundraising efforts involved at the time. For example, on January 14, 1884, B.W. Arnett of Wilberforce, Ohio, published in the *Recorder* an “Offer to the ministers and members of the A.M.E. Church.” In addition to material incentives, he stated, “I will give a present to every church in the connection that will raise one dollar for each member. We will have a roll of honor and usefulness, and the pastor who will raise one dollar for or from each of his members will be put down on that roll and published in the Budget of 1886.” Arnett indicated that the funds would go toward denomination leadership and building projects: “The Bishops and General Officers must be paid. The Metropolitan church in Washington must be competed, by order of the General Conference” (Arnett 1886). The funds raised and represented in the Roll may therefore have been for special projects or for a

general fund, rather than for the church's printed organ, the *Recorder*. Another fundraiser, for which the *Recorder* reported contributions from Easton in 1880, served to replenish the funds for missionary work in Haiti after the A.M.E.'s mission there worked itself into arrears (Tanner 1880). Subscribers' and donors' names appearing in the publication therefore did not always signify direct subscription to the newspaper itself. Nevertheless, the Easton congregation's participation in these fundraisers indicates clearly that at least some members of the congregation read the *Christian Recorder*. Although the *Christian Recorder* was based in Philadelphia at the African Methodist Episcopal Church's headquarters church, "Mother" Bethel, its reach was therefore quite broad across the United States and it had an audience here in Easton.

African-American residents of Easton in the nineteenth century also submitted content for African-American-operated newspapers. They sent news, personal notes, and poetry, using the pages of African-American newspapers to communicate with other free African-American communities elsewhere. African-Americans from Easton also used the *Recorder* to convey more urgent messages. On August 24, 1867, Samuel Dixon turned to the pages of the *Recorder* to post a desperate plea for information that could help him reunite his family, which had been torn apart by slavery: "Information wanted of Lucy E. Dixon, the daughter of Samuel and Mary Dixon, who went to Allen, Louisiana, about the year 1847. Anyone knowing and informing me of her whereabouts will oblige me very much" and he posted his address (Dixon 1867). African-American newspapers therefore formed vital links between people in Easton and the rest of the world.

On a lighter note, F.H. Hughes of Easton, Maryland, wrote twice *Recorder* in 1876 with poetry and prose, which the paper published on March 9 and April 20 (Hughes 1876a; Hughes 1876b). The first piece Hughes shared was a widely-reprinted anonymous poem "Be Careful

What You Say,” which Hughes copied under the title “Throwing Stones” as advice for the publication’s readers after, “being a constant reader of your valuable paper; and seeing in numbers of your late issues collisions or controversies” (Hughes 1876a). Hughes’ second submission was a short paragraph of prose that eloquently describes the yearnings for home by those taken from it, whether they be “the African torn from his willow braided hut” or “the New England mariner amid the icebergs of the Northern seas” (Hughes 1876b). On September 19, 1828, *Freedom’s Journal* acknowledged “the receipt of a letter from Easton, Md. with \$3 enclosed. - "Arion" and "C." have been received, and will appear in our next. - "A." in our next, if our columns will admit” (*Freedom’s Journal* 1828a). Indeed, the columns did admit the contribution and, the next week, the paper printed two poems. The one signed “C.” was a recommendation of a poem by New Hampshire poet Nathaniel Appleton Haven on the subject of “Autumn” (*Freedom’s Journal* 1828b; Chapin 1883:49). The other poem, signed “Arion,” appears to be an original composition and takes as its subject the changing of the seasons as a metaphor for the lifecourse (Arion 1828a). *Freedom’s Journal* printed another of Arion’s poems the following month, this time waxing romantically about a sunset and evening’s beauty, meant to be sung to the tune of Scottish poet Robert Burns’ “Bonnie Doon” (Arion 1828b). These three poems, one suggested and two composed for *Freedom’s Journal*, appear to be the work of two Easton residents. Although these individuals may have been members of Easton’s free African-American community, it is more likely that they were white. Nathan Haven, author of the recommended poem on autumn, attended college at Harvard in the early nineteenth century and must have been white (Chapin 1883:49). Of course, any literate individual could have read his work and passed on a recommendation for it. However, the pseudonym and writing of the author of the two original poems both suggest a high degree of education and traveling experience that

would have been uncommon among free African Americans growing up on Maryland's Eastern Shore in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Arion was a Greek poet and musician who lived around 600 B.C. He was acclaimed to have had great talent and his life was mythologized by the Ancient Greeks (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). Taking this pen name demonstrated that the author living in Easton had had a solid classical education. Given the dearth of formal schooling available to Talbot County people of color at the time, the author was not likely to have been of African descent. There are also details in the second poem that suggest the worldliness of a well-traveled individual. In its description of the sunset, the poem describes a blue mountain in the west, waves, and islands. A mountainous geography is entirely alien to Maryland's Eastern Shore and the Appalachian Mountains to the west lie nowhere near any large body of water. The poet may be recalling a previous occasion experienced elsewhere. It is also equally possible, and well within the romantic genre within which the poem falls, that this landscape occurred in the poet's imagination. Certainly, Scotland has the requisite geography and the poet's indication of the melody for the song as one from Robert Burns suggests at least a literary familiarity with Caledonia. Taken together, the use of a classical Greek pen name and use of foreign imagery suggest, though of course they do not prove, that the author was white. At any rate, these contributions demonstrate from an early date the involvement of Easton residents in the antebellum free black press.

Readers of various nineteenth-century African-American newspapers would have been at least passingly familiar with events in Easton, Maryland. News stories from the town periodically cropped up in the pages of these publications from the 1820s onward. The first of these stories, simply titled "Caution," appeared in *Freedom's Journal* on December 14, 1827: "A child was left tied to a chair, in a house near Easton, Md. while its mother went for a bucket of

water: during her absence, a hog entered the room, upset the chair and threw the child into the fire, where it was so shockingly burnt that it survived only a few hours” (*Freedom’s Journal* 1827). The *Journal* printed another story the following spring about a free man of color from Easton who, convicted of murdering another man while drunk, gave a speech about temperance from the hangman’s scaffold (*Freedom’s Journal* 1828c). In 1848, the *North Star* noted the escape of 12 people in Talbot county from slavery (*North Star* 1848b). In 1855, the *National Era* reprinted an article from the *Easton Gazette* in which a white resident of Easton describes “considerable feeling in our town and county the past week, owing to many rumors in circulation that the blacks of the county contemplated, during the Easter holydays, an insurrection...” White residents met in Easton to decide on a response and voted to suppress unsupervised meetings of African Americans, in accordance with laws limiting freedom of assembly that had until then been loosely enforced (*National Era* 1855b). Later that year, the same paper again shared news from the *Easton Gazette*, this time of the beginning of surveying for the building of a railroad through Oxford, to the south of Easton (*National Era* 1855c). *Douglass’ Monthly* reported in 1859, in Easton, “A free negro, convicted at Easton, Md., of larceny, has been sold as slave for twenty-five years’ service, for \$138,75” (*Douglass’ Monthly* 1859). During the Civil War, newspapers also followed war-related events, including the movement of a party from Easton northward toward Centreville and Queenstown, who seized “1500 stand of arms and one or two cannon” (*Christian Recorder* 1861a). In 1865, after a particularly moving welcome for a new African Methodist Episcopal minister for Bethel Church, Charles Dobson wrote to the *Christian Recorder’s* editors to describe the parade and the service. “We are now in the pursuit of knowledge, for we have been kept in chains and darkness long enough,” he wrote. “We thank God that the light has now come. The Lord has blessed us this year with a good Shepherd”

(Dobson 1865). These snippets of news, both from local Easton papers and from Eastoners themselves, suggest that at least the editors of African-American newspapers in the nineteenth century read the local papers from Easton and thought news from Talbot County worth sharing with wider audiences.

On occasion, coverage of news from Easton went deeper into feature and editorial pieces. In a retrospective on Nat Turner's 1831 revolt and the backlash against both enslaved and free African Americans that followed it, a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* describes how quickly the alarm and a "harvest of terror" went up through the South and describes how great alarm went up on Maryland's Eastern Shore, "especially in the neighborhood of Easton and Snowhill" (reprinted in *Douglass' Monthly* 1861). In 1865, a free African-American Easton resident signing their initials C.D. reported on the recent visit to Easton and lectures there by Dr. H. Jerome Brown of Philadelphia, one of the few African Americans to take up phrenology. We now know phrenology—or the study of intelligence and character through the outer size and shape of the skull—to be a pseudoscience, but in 1865 it was cutting-edge science. "It was new to us," writes C.D., "in this isolated spot to have a man of our own identity speaking among us, discussing the mental philosophers of the past, and comparing them with the newly discovered metaphysical conclusions of the present hour." The author describes Brown's lectures in detail, noting also that the audience included both white and black people alike. Brown commented on the advancement of African Americans at that time toward equality with white people. He argued as well that there was equal moral improvement to be made in the white man in curbing savagery and cruelty through the abolition of slavery and slave-owning. "He also eulogized highly the *Christian Recorder* and *Anglo-African*, saying that every colored family in town should subscribe to one or the other, which I think will have a salutary effect. After an hour and a

half the address was closed amid the applause of a once benighted and enslaved community” (D. 1865). Whatever the issues with the basis of phrenology, the integration of the audience and Brown’s positive message about the possibility of improvement of both races through social change, literacy, and education—and his ability to say such things publicly without being chased out of town—speak to at least some progressive tendencies in Easton’s population.

However, education was often hard to come by in Easton for free people of color, as two writers from Maryland made very clear in the pages of the *Christian Recorder*. In 1876, Rev. G.W. Young of Trappe, a town near Easton, described how the white people had closed the public schools in the area, allegedly for lack of money, and Young had tried in vain to convince his people that they needed to pay for private schooling until such time as the public schools reopened. At Young's invitation, a Professor Hazely came to Easton to give a lecture on the importance of education (Young 1878). Jacob C. Hazeley was a self-proclaimed "professor" who traveled as a lecturer. He was born in Sierra Leone (Massey 1887). In Easton, Hazely spoke of education as power to speak and be heard, as a means to power. He then led the donations himself and enough money was collected to reopen the school and pay the teacher's salary (Young 1878). Despite these efforts, the inadequacy of funds continued to plague educational efforts among free African Americans in Easton and throughout the whole state of Maryland. G.W. Milford described the problem to *The Globe* in 1884 and the editors of the *Christian Recorder* reprinted his lengthy assessment. “Colored” children began to take part in Maryland's public schools in 1872. However, they were not funded in the same way or at the same levels as the white schools (Milford 1884). This resulted in less time in class for students: “The Easton colored school, in which I have the honor to labor, has 196 scholars. The colored public schools of Talbot county open on the 1st of October.” Even though the colored and white

schools were both supposed to run for 10 months, the colored schools in Talbot and Caroline Counties ran for far less than that, Caroline being the shortest. Still, the free African-American community did its best:

The colored teachers of Talbot county are, as a rule, well qualified, bringing much experience to the work. Mr. Alex Chaplain, the examiner of the public schools, declare that he is determined not to have any other kind. Five or six of the thirteen colored school buildings of the county are ‘bran new stuff stuffed with new bran,’ having the best facilities and appliances, and being in happy contrast to some of the rest. As a generalizing the scholars take much interest in the studies, and had they more incentives to exertion, we might have the highest hope of their future fortunes. The clergy, with rare exceptions do all they can to aid us in our educational work. Occasionally I meet an old foggy, who in his vaunting platitudes and gross ignorance, pretends to know all God's plans and purposes, and persistently seeks to throw a damper upon education. The church and the school are very closely related, and the one can do much to help the other, if it will (Milford 1884).

In addition to his observations, Milford makes a case for integrated schools on the basis that students would learn much from each other in addition to the official curriculum—much a similar argument to that for diversity today. In the absence of integration, he makes a case for having colored teachers in colored schools so that the salaries of the teachers may support and lift up the colored communities. Milford and the editors of these newspapers shared these remarks because news on the progress and obstacles toward freedom and equality in local places like Easton helped to inform and inspire efforts elsewhere. Through these news stories and in-depth analyses, news from Easton traveled out to free African Americans living throughout the United States.

Nineteenth-century readers from Easton could also follow the fates of people from Easton through the pages of free African-American newspapers. Frederick Douglass is the most famous person to ever come out of Talbot County and he went on to publish the *North Star*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and *Douglass' Monthly* after escaping slavery in 1838. Douglass was not from



Easton but did come through the town in shackles and was held for a time in the county jail after one of his escape attempts (Douglass 1848). In 1854, the *Provincial Freeman* republished a notification from the *Vermont Tribune* that a Charlotte Gilchrist, a fugitive slave from Easton, had just crossed into Canada. “She is twenty years of age, tall, well informed, and of far more than ordinary intelligence, able to read fluently, a member of the Methodist Church, and a daughter of her Master! Yes, she was running away from her own father, Ruffla Gilchrist of Easton, Md., because he sold her to a South Carolinian for \$1,100” (*Provincial Freeman* 1854b). In 1869, the *Christian Recorder* carried James Williams’ obituary for Sarah Ann Armstrong, who was born free in New Bedford Massachusetts, and taught free African-American children in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Canada. After returning from a missionary trip to Africa in the 1860s, she taught again in Rhode Island and then in Easton. “Here she did a great service, both to the parents and children. She was instrumental in building a fine schoolhouse and paid for it” (Williams 1869). The *Recorder* also carried the marriage announcement that same year of an Easton man who had moved to Baltimore (*Christian Recorder* 1869c) and an obituary for Rev. Jacob Thomas, who was born enslaved and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church (probably Asbury Church) in Easton at age 16. He died free in New England (Davis 1870). The *Christian Recorder* also gave extensive coverage of various church activities and people from Easton occasionally appeared. In 1884, Bishop Alexander Walker Wayman, himself from Caroline County, adjacent to Talbot, noted in a report from his visit to New Orleans that he had run into a John Lewis, “who was sold from Easton, MD, many years ago. He is now one of the ministers of the conference” (Wayman 1884). The delegation to the general conference of the A.M.E. Church in 1896 included Rev. Charles E. Harris, who was born near Easton in 1841 (*Christian Recorder* 1896). Some African-Americans from Easton and the rest

of Talbot County thus traveled a good deal, sometimes to escape slavery and other times for church work or as the winds of life blew them. Because Easton residents read these newspapers, they could occasionally hear how people they knew had fared.

Eastoners even added their own notices to the mix. In 1870, William H. Smith wrote an obituary for Fanny Chase that the *Christian Recorder* printed alongside its other obituaries. Smith commends Chase on a long life lived unrightly. “Her house was always open to receive ministers and her hands to supply their wants” (Smith 1870a). Another, unsigned obituary appeared in the *Recorder* in 1876 for Robert Aiking of Easton, who had died of consumption (*Christian Recorder* 1876). Whether they stayed in Easton or left for communities far from the Eastern Shore, the lives of African Americans from Easton made it into the pages of nineteenth-century African-American newspapers with a fair degree of consistency.

Religious relationships played a strong role in linking free African Americans in Easton with those in other communities throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. Church communications feature prominently in the record of nineteenth-century African-American newspapers in part because the *Christian Recorder* was the longest-lived of these papers but also simply because of the importance of religious life to holding together local, regional, and national free African-American communities and of communication and travel between these communities at various geographical scales to the life of African Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal Churches. Some of the most common appearances of Easton in the African-American newspapers of the period are the *Christian Recorder*'s notes on the visits of ministers traveling the circuits between churches in the Baltimore Conference. In August of 1861, “a subscriber” from Washington, D.C., announced the arrival of Rev. William Waugh

Grimes in that city and gives a short biography of Grimes, who had previously spent several years serving the Easton circuit in Maryland until he ran afoul of local authorities:

Soon after he entered on the duties of this charge, the new work of the Lord revived, his church increased with good members, the old members blessed him, sinners would stand in the way to behold him, while the children ran to meet him, his prosperity soon made him enemies. He was reported to the civil authorities as being the agent of the underground railroad. This raised the indignation of the white people against him; they threatened to hang him. He was taken and thrown into jail, and there confined for some time, when he was transported to Baltimore, with orders to leave the State. He went back the next day, and staid there till Conference. He suffered much at this circuit, but the Lord was with him (*Christian Recorder* 1861b).

Ministers from the A.M.E. Church traveled more freely after the Civil War. In 1878, the presiding elder of the Baltimore conference, who was himself from Easton (N. 1897), described his recent circuit of the conference, especially the Eastern Shore. He gives this report of Easton:

The 22nd found us in Easton, Talbot County, the place of glorious memories. Here, [previous ministers] laid broad, and deep African Methodism. The old Bethel ship is well managed under that earnest worker, Rev. James T. Morris. He has the finest church edifice upon the Peninsula. He must look well or the Rev. A.M. Green, at Cambridge, (who will lay the corner stone of a new church, Sept. 22nd,) will take the banner. Our church is making progress in old Talbot. The conference was grand; we have but two preachers stationed in this county, but next year Bishop Brown will have to send three, if not four pastors to man the work. Such is the outlook. (Handy 1878).

In 1888, Rev. T. G. Steward also came down the Shore from Baltimore. In his report to the church through the *Recorder*, he describes the Eastern Shore's geography and his journey by steamer and coach to stay with the family of Joseph Gray opposite Bethel Church. The Sunday service was an all-day rally to raise funds for a church debt—probably the construction of the brick church in the previous decade—and they raised \$301. The congregation from Denton came and gave \$26. Steward congratulates the congregations on their fraternity. He reports that the pastor is full of energy, the pastor's wife “seems to be a thorough itinerant preacher herself and is much beloved by the people,” the Sunday school is strong and giving good education, the

singing is excellent. Steward describes his journey as particularly rough (Steward 1888), but it was nowhere near the experiences of some visiting pastors before the war. Just before the close of the century, James Handy, by then a bishop, again visited Easton. He arrived the day after Christmas, was taken to Unionville where he preached Sunday morning the next day, and returned to lead an evening service in Easton. A banquet was thrown for him on Monday night at Bethel A.M.E. Church to recognize the success he had achieved in life (N. 1897). Whether by their own hand or by another author, the bishops of the church frequently reported their circuits in the *Christian Recorder*.

The most regular accounts of circuit visits to Easton came from Alexander Walker Wayman, who was born on a farm in Caroline County just across the Tuckahoe Creek from Talbot County and who eventually became an A.M.E. bishop. In 1864, he described to the *Christian Recorder* a visit back to his home, stopping in Easton on his way there (Wayman 1864). In 1869, Easton lay in the middle of his circuit of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (Wayman 1869). He reported several subsequent visits as well in the course of his regular circuits of the Baltimore and other conferences (*Christian Recorder* 1884; Wayman 1885; Wayman 1887; *Christian Recorder* 1889; Wayman 1890). Toward the end of his life, Wayman continued to attend special events on the Eastern Shore on invitation. In 1890, he added a stop at the end of his tour of congregations in Kentucky and Tennessee to attend a “jubilee” in Easton to mark the closure of Bethel Church’s construction debt from the 1870s (*Christian Recorder* 1890). The year before his death (Davis N.d.), the bishop described to the *Recorder* his visit to the Shore for a dedication at Ivorytown, just outside of Easton. During this trip, he stayed in Easton with his old friend Joseph Gray and with the Rev. J.B. Warner, then pastor of Bethel Church (Wayman 1894). Wayman served during his life as a representative of

the Eastern Shore in the A.M.E. Church and his work, as well as that of many other preachers in the Baltimore Conference, helped to bind Easton's free African Americans, particularly those who attended Bethel Church, to other free African-American communities through the church.

Easton's congregation at Bethel was also quite active in regional and national church activities. The *Christian Recorder* announced Easton's hosting of the Baltimore Conference in 1881 (Handy 1881), a district meeting in 1891 (Cooper 1891), and the Women's Mite Missionary Society's national gathering in 1901 (Lee 1901; Lee et. al 1901; Wright 1916:323). But, far from passively accepting hosting duties when their turn arose, the African Methodist Episcopal congregation of Easton took the initiative in organizing church activities and reaching out to their neighbors—and used the *Recorder* to advertise these activities. In 1870, W.H. Smith, elder in charge of both Easton and Denton, announced a “contemplated” camp meeting for that summer that month in Caroline County that he was helping to plan (Smith 1870b). Later that fall, he reported that the choir from Easton had taken part in the dedication of the Denton congregation's new building (Smith 1870c). An A. Jones wrote to the *Recorder* in 1876 of a joint service where the pastor and band from Unionville's St. Stephen's A.M.E. Church joined Bethel in Easton. It was “one of the greatest prayer meetings that has been witnessed for years in Easton” (Jones 1876). The next year, Bethel (Easton)'s pastor A.W. Woodhouse gave an account of his trip to visit the congregation in Deep Creek, Virginia (Woodhouse 1877). With the completion of the Bethel congregation's brick building in Easton in 1878, Woodhouse embarked on a circuit to other congregations in Maryland, D.C., Virginia, and Pennsylvania to raise funds for his church. He wrote to the *Recorder* that all but the pastor of the A.M.E. denomination's mother church in Philadelphia received him warmly. “Oct 30th I returned home just in time to see the bricklayers finish their work” (Woodhouse 1878a). The saga of Easton

Bethel's efforts to pay their construction debt continued in the pages of the *Christian Recorder* for many years after (Woodhouse 1878b; Diggs 1890a; Diggs 1890b; Wayman 1891; *Christian Recorder* 1901). In the meantime, Easton's church continued to support the conference. Rev. James I. Morris of Easton traveled to Baltimore in 1878 to speak at the funeral of longtime pastor and physician A.R. Green (*Christian Recorder* 1878c). The *Christian Recorder* reflected these connections between congregations and served as a medium for communication with the wider body of African Methodist Episcopal churches throughout the United States. Ministers appear to have written more often to the *Recorder* than lay members of the church. It is possible that they read it more often too. However, it is clear from the authorship of the various entries in the church's periodical that readership did extend throughout the congregations. Visits by pastors who were active contributors and readers of the *Recorder* also enhanced access to it by less well-educated members of the church.

African American in Easton were well-connected with the discourses the nineteenth-century free black press constructed. Subscription rolls and submissions of various sorts from people living in Easton or associated with the community there provide the clearest evidence of this involvement in written discourses. And there is ample evidence of this sort. Where authorship is unknown, references to Easton in news from the town and from further abroad demonstrate that Easton was a known quantity for free African American living elsewhere and vice versa. Given these deep connections between Eastoners of color and many African-American newspapers of the nineteenth century, it is reasonable to use the full range of discourses in the pages of these publications to interpret the archaeological record of African-American life on The Hill because there is a strong possibility that people living in this neighborhood read any given article from one of these papers. Given that at least some Easton

residents took part in and consumed the discourses of the emerging black middle class through the pages of these newspapers, the question then becomes: what do these discourses tell us about interpreting the artifacts from The Hill?

### Marbles and the Making of Independent Men

Throughout excavations of The Hill between 2012 and 2019, archaeologists working on The Hill Community Project have recovered marbles from every site we have surveyed. They occur in abundance at the domestic residences of the Freeman site (18TA445), the Talbot County Women's Club site (18TA439), the Bethel A.M.E. Church site (18TA441), and the Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier (colloquially, the Buffalo Soldier Home, 18TA440), as well as at the site of Asbury United Methodist Church. Marbles were thus ubiquitous across The Hill without regard for the race or class of a site's occupants. Out of approximately 219 toys identified among the artifact assemblages of these five sites, as determined by unique toys and components, there were 115 individual marbles. On average, marbles accounted for more than



**Figure 2.1:** Some of the marbles recovered during excavations on The Hill. These are from the Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier (18TA440) and are representative of the full collection, with machine-made twentieth-century marbles dominating but handmade ceramic marbles continuing in use well after mass production of glass marbles began.

half of all toys. From site to site among these five archaeological sites, the proportion of toys made up by marbles ranged from 34% to 58%. Most of the areas excavated at any of the five sites in this study focused on the yard areas around buildings. This is where children would play with marbles, setting out a playing area on the ground.

The ratio of marbles to other toys correlates positively with the total number of toys over time, meaning that demand for marbles was more fluid than demand for other toys even while they remained the most popular toy. Marbles declined in popularity by the early twenty-first century and are not used much today. However, they retained a prominent place in living memory among older residents. This memory, the geographical universality of the toy across The Hill, and its tremendous popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries make marbles a powerful material access point for childhood on The Hill, particularly among boys. Unfortunately, their ubiquity also makes spatial analysis less powerful for interpreting their cultural meaning in the community. For that, I turn to the historical African-American newspapers of the nineteenth century.

Stories, essays, and other notes in the pages of these newspapers associated marbles at various times with the innocence of childhood, the wickedness of sin, the importance of individualism, and the need for finding balance in life. These literary associations invested in these little toys messages to young boys about risk, reward, skill, and hard work as well as play. These themes guided young men toward personal growth, mastery of themselves, and a strong sense of individualism. A search in the Accessible Archives database of historical African-American newspapers for the keyword “marble” returned 49 published pieces relating to the toy and its use in the first 500 search results. Marbles appear in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers in articles of a variety of formats. Most of these pieces fall under two



genres: stories for parents to read aloud to their children (18 articles) and moralistic or religious writings (10 articles). Others include essays, news, poetry, and stories not necessarily directed at children. The authors of these pieces either discuss marbles and marble-playing directly or employ them as symbols and as metaphors in support of central themes conveying moral lessons.

The stories, essays, news pieces, and poetry in the African-American newspapers depict marble playing principally as a masculine and as a youthful activity. Mainly, it is boys who are seen playing marbles in these accounts. A boy or boys make up the majority of appearances (25 out of 49). The number may be raised to 28 if we include young men. Sometimes it is children generally and these instances make up the second largest category. Marbles therefore are generally associated with both childhood and with the male gender. Only six cases fall outside of these two age and gender categories. Of those six, five do not depict or discuss anyone in particular playing marbles. That the greatest number of occurrences fall within the intersection of childhood and masculinity shapes marbles' representations and the meanings attached to them.

**Table 2.1: Identities of Those Depicted as Playing with Marbles in the Newspaper Sample**

25 boy or boys	1 young white and black men
9 gender-nonspecific child or children	1 Negroes
1 girl	1 ministers
1 girl and uncle	1 soldiers
1 men	1 urchins
2 young men	5 no one in particular

*Marbles as a symbolic marker of childhood*

In addition to appearing depicting marbles in the hands of male children, the sample of articles dealing with playing marbles includes thirteen instances in which the toy stands as a

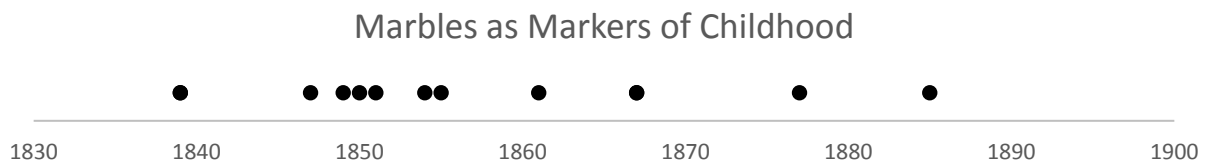
symbolic representation of, and marker denoting, childhood as a social category. For example, the author of “The Infant Knowledge System,” which the editors of *The Colored American* republished in 1839 from the *New York Mirror*, associates marbles with pure play in their argument that children should be allowed to enjoy childhood free of expectations and responsibilities: “Now is this wholesome--is it natural? Is it fair--is it humane, that a child should be cheated out of its childhood and sent to learn the 'use of the globes' before it has learnt to play at marbles?” (*Colored American* 1839a).

This vision of an innocent and playful childhood set apart as a separate period of life with a value and set of needs all its own reflects middle-class African-Americans’ involvement in a larger shift in the meaning of childhood that took place across Western society in the nineteenth century. This concept of a “sentimental childhood” (Betti 2017:17) took hold between 1830 and 1870, most prominently among the white middle classes of the Northern states before spreading to the South after the Civil War (Calvert 1992; Betti 2017:17–18). Phillip Bell’s decision to republish this perspective in *The Colored American* in 1839 signifies the editor’s endorsement for this new vision of childhood developing in the North at the time. This perspective appears later in *The Christian Recorder* in two pieces (*Christian Recorder* 1867; W. 1872) written for mothers. The authors of all three pieces argue: let boys be boys; let them be innocent while they can.

Several pieces use the act of playing with marbles to set the scene for a story and draw upon this symbolism of innocent play. In a temperance story that ran in *The National Era* in 1852, the scene opens with a young boy playing marbles. The boy dies of sickness and the bulk of the plot revolves around the father’s grief and his descent into drinking. Ultimately, his daughters’ encouragement and mockery brings him out of it again. The infant son whose death

drives the story serves mainly as a plot device, but his playing with marbles strengthens his role as instigator of intense grief on the part of the father. Play is the only activity the young boy ever performs in this narrative and, as such, his marbles symbolize his childlike innocence. The father pays scant attention until the end of the story to his older daughters, one of whom receives his scorn for not taking care of the boy exactly as he had desired (Irving 1852a). The father's preference for the boy over his daughters appears to derive in part from chauvinism but also in part from the innocence and tender age of his youngest, male child. The marbles in this story establish the boy's status as child, as an innocent; and his father feels his loss with correspondingly greater depth until he realizes, belatedly, the value of his older daughters, whose significance and value derive more from their active roles as conscious decision-makers who encourage their father to disavow drink: that is, as responsible young adults.

Marbles as symbolic markers of childhood appear throughout the chronological range of the publications in the collection. However, they concentrate more densely in the late 1840s and early 1850s than during other parts of the range. On the premise that discourse will be more active on a subject during a period of ideological change, this cluster of appearances may indicate the period in which the idea of a separate, innocent, playful childhood mainly took hold among the free African American communities who contributed and subscribed to these papers,



**Figure 2.2:** Charting references to marbles as markers of childhood according to their publication year indicates a cluster of usages around 1850 amid an otherwise even spread.

particularly members of the black middle class. Apart from this cluster, literary uses of marbles in this manner crop up fairly regularly every seven to ten years.

*Direct and exclusive association*

In a few cases, writers associate marbles directly and exclusively with young boys such that the words boy and marble become coidentified into a single term. In an (1861) article for *The Christian Recorder* on “The Arts and Sciences: Porcelain and Pottery,” for example, a contributor signing their name Brisbee recommends that working-class free African Americans take their own initiative to lift themselves up through industry, rather than waiting for a whole lot of hot air from the “Negro Aristocracy.” The author recommends that some collection of young men enter into the ceramics industry, where they could produce, among other goods, “boys’ marbles.” This essential identification of marbles as belonging to and being used by boys solidifies further the association between this population and this artifact type that authors of other pieces make when they predominantly depict boys as the people who play with marbles and when they use marbles to represent (a predominantly male) childhood.

Easton’s free African-American community in the nineteenth century most likely adhered to this association of marbles mostly with young boys. In Easton, the understanding of marbles as toys for boys rather than for girls continued into the twentieth century. Barney Brooks, now in his 70s, recalls playing marbles quite a lot (oral history interview, 10/6/2018). Yvonne Freeman, who grew up on The Hill in the 1960s and ‘70s, recalls being the only girl the boys allowed to play marbles with them. She recently bought marbles and jacks for the children at her church to play and was surprised that these twenty-first children, who did not grow up with

gendered associations for these particular toys, disregarded the gender norms with which she was familiar:

I was really surprised at the way that the guys wanted to play [jacks] because, really, when we played it, it was all girls. I don't even know if there were—maybe one or two guys who played—but it was mainly the girls who played jacks.<sup>23</sup> We played—the girls played jacks; the boys played marbles. But I played marbles because I was a bit of a tomboy. And I was good at it, so the boys would let me play. I wasn't, you know, one of those girly-girls who afraid to get dirty, so I could get down and get dirty so I could play with the boys (oral history interview with Yvonne Freeman, October 17, 2018).

Freeman was far from the only African-American girl ever to play marbles. Beginning at an early age, she began to collect photographs and news stories, especially when they related to someone in her family. When discussing marbles and children's toys with me in the fall of 2018, prompted by the abundant findings of marbles at sites across The Hill, Freeman brought out a copy of the children's Mini Page from Baltimore's *Evening Sun* dated June 4, 1979. She was 18 when it ran. The Mini Page details a regional marble-shooting tournament held in Wildwood, New Jersey. It pictured the two winners from the previous year, an African-American boy and girl, both from Pennsylvania. The brief article notes that, during the 1930s and '40s, girls rarely played marbles. The author therefore creates a division between a gendered association of the game in the past and a 1970s present in which the masculinity of the game had broken down. The nineteenth-century newspaper references to who played marbles, Yvonne Freeman's depiction of herself as the exception to marble-playing as a game for boys, and the writer's comments in the *Evening Sun* article indicate that the development of girls playing by the latter half of the twentieth century was a relatively new phenomenon.

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<sup>23</sup> Archaeologically, we have recovered only one jack from any of the sites we have excavated in Easton. It was well-preserved, but, since jacks are made of thin metal, they may easily rust and fall apart or otherwise become unrecognizable. Interestingly, the only jack that we did recover was from the uppermost stratum of a test unit at the rear of the backyard at the Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier, which was immediately next-door to the house Yvonne Freeman lived in when she was a child playing jacks and marbles. This particular jack may well have belonged to her or her friends.

Page 1

Especially for young readers

**The Mini Page**

Member of  Distinguished Achievement Awards Winner

©1979 by Universal Press Syndicate

THE EVENING SUN, BALTIMORE, MD., MONDAY, JUNE 4, 1979

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**An old sport rolls on**

# Mighty Marble Tournament



Marbles were especially popular in the 1930s and '40s. This was right after the Depression, when people didn't have much money to spend for fun.



Dean Feinauer, co-winner of the 1978 tournament, gets ready to shoot. The contest uses specially built marble rings made of cement. Most kids play marbles in the dirt.

### How to play



1. Place the back of your hand on the ground with the shooting marble resting inside the first finger between the tip and the first joint.



2. Carefully roll up your hand, keeping the marble steady with the tip of the nail of your thumb. By taking careful aim and flicking your thumb, you can force the marble out into the marble ring.

Although the mighty marble has lost a lot of its punch, there are some kids still playing. Many of them have been competing in local contests across the country. They are trying to reach the national "Big Blue Marble" marbles tournament. It will be held at Wildwood, New Jersey, later on this month. The tournament is sponsored by "Big Blue Marble," an award-winning TV series for kids.

George Washington played with marbles made of clay. Marbles were very popular in this country in the 1930s and 1940s . . . before TV. Back then, boys carried sacks of marbles tied to their trousers. Girls didn't play much.



1978 Champs Diane and Dean.

Thirteen-year-olds Diane Bertosh of Pittsburgh, Pa., and Dean Feinauer of Reading, Pa., were the 1978 marble-shooting champs. Each received a \$500 college scholarship and a trophy. They were among the 54 boys and girls to compete at the tournament held at Wildwood, N.J. Kids from 8 to 14 can enter. This year's contest will begin on June 28 at Wildwood.

Please Cut Here

**Figure 2.3:** Newspaper article from 1979 in Yvonne Freeman's collection. It describes regional tournaments in marble-playing and the winners. It also discusses changes over time in the gender makeup of participants in this game.

### *A mixed bag of metaphors*

At other times, writers and editors for these African-American newspapers use marbles beyond discussions of children as metaphors or as points of comparison. These uses install marbles as a commonly-understood point of reference and illustrate their ubiquity throughout 19<sup>th</sup>-century American society. J.M. Eells, writing to the *National Era*'s editor from West Troy, New York, in 1851, used marbles' association with childhood to condemn the politicians of the time. The author despairs that members of both the Whig and the Democratic parties allowed themselves to become distracted by petty arguments while questions of human rights and universal freedom went unaddressed. Such politicians the subscriber calls "big, grown-up boys, who have not, and we fear never will, come to either the age or stature of true political manhood, playing marbles and spinning tops, while Despotism lights her forge...and her practiced eye takes the dimensions of the limbs which shall certainly wear her fetters." In this case, playing marbles signifies childish frivolity and becomes a symbol for the myriad ideological and personal divisions that distract from the ability to form political coalitions and accomplish meaningful improvements in the governance of society and society's wellbeing.

In quite a different vein, a brief entry in *The North Star* in 1850 draws on marbles to make a commentary on the uniformity of society: "Nature made us individuals, as she did the flowers and the pebbles; but we are afraid to be peculiar, and so our society resembles a bag of marbles or a strings of mould candles. Why should we all dress after the same fashion?" Certainly, any bag of colorful glass marbles from the latter nineteenth or twentieth century might contain a mixture of colors and styles after many rounds of swapping marbles and playing for keeps, practices to which this collection of newspapers attests from 1849 and 1862, respectively.

However, the earlier undecorated clay marbles like those that come from the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century layers on The Hill were undecorated earthenware and fairly indistinguishable. Even when German manufacturers introduced glass marbles in the 1840s, all of those from a single cane of glass bore the same colors and styles of decoration. Regardless of the intended reference point of the metaphor, the author's celebration of diversity and individuality would have had a special significance for their African-American audience. The institution of slavery and the racial ideologies that underpinned it worked to strip enslaved black folks of their personhood and cast them as mere cogs in the machinery of production. In terms of apparel, plantation owners could hardly be bothered to provide much choice or variation in the basic clothing they provided to their enslaved workforces, excepting the well-liveried personal domestic. Indeed, Gillian Galle (2006; 2010) finds that enslaved men and women in Virginia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries spent much effort to buy fashionable buttons to distinguish themselves among their compatriots. Freedom brought the same conundrum as free African Americans faced limitations of the cultivation of their personal intellectual growth through restricted educational opportunities and limitations on their personal expression in such realms as the ballot box. Individuality has remained a challenge and the lingering notion that all people of a race look the same still haunts us today. With the great variety of marbles available in the twenty-first century, perhaps the symbolism today might be reversed.

Occasionally, authors even used marbles simply as reference points within discussions wholly unrelated to childhood or to the game itself. An (1839) article in *The Colored American* instructs those interested in making a scale model of the solar system that "a full sized cherry or boy's marble" may stand in for Uranus when carried "nearly a mile distant" from the small orange representing Saturn. A writer for *The Christian Recorder*, when describing the loading



and firing of mortars in 1862 for an audience in the midst of the Civil War, writes that the airborne shell once fired becomes no larger than a marble (*Christian Recorder* 1862a). And the author of a story for children in the same publication seven years later writes that the amount of oil a man uses to grease the wheels of his wagon might have been rolled up “into the size of a couple of marbles” (*Christian Recorder* 1869b). Only to an audience well able to picture the size of such a toy would these references make sense.

Marbles were able to carry such a variety of meanings and to serve as reference points because people of all backgrounds were so familiar with the tiny spheres themselves and the games played with them. Marbles were exceedingly cheap and one story even uses their low cost as a way to emphasize a character’s supposed miserly qualities: “He would try to cheapen the price of a marble” (*Christian Recorder* 1864b). Even a child could make a simple, undecorated earthenware marble, given a source of good clay and a means of firing it. Such marbles continued in use into the twentieth century in Easton, where they appear in contexts alongside those made of glass by machine. Their ease of manufacture and low cost contributed to marbles’ abundance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on The Hill, as elsewhere. And their audiences’ familiarity with them provided the flexibility authors needed to use them in a variety of ways and attach multiple meanings to such a simple artifact. Most importantly, writers used marbles’ commonness and their dominant association with childhood to convey moral lessons for children.

*Imparting lessons*

Probably the most important genre of articles pertaining to marbles in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers were parables meant to be read aloud to children. Like other African-American communities, the residents of The Hill were able to draw on the collective discourse contained in the pages of these publications for lessons to teach their children and stories within which to couch those lessons. Within the sample of newspaper articles, two dominant genres carried moral messages: religious or moralistic pieces and stories intended for children. There were also three articles aimed at mothers. The religious or moralistic articles account for 11 of the 49 in the sample. These usually take a negative tone toward marbles and associate them frequently with gambling. These authors condemn marble-playing as a sin, especially on the Sabbath, and tend to celebrate church and Sunday school as more appropriate activities for youngsters and adults alike. The stories for children carry a diverse set of messages that sometimes overlap with those in the religious and moralistic pieces but are couched in very different language.

The authors of the sampled articles placed the greatest emphasis on the need for children to be responsible. Hard work, they urged, would pay off later in life. In “I Wish I Was a Kitten,” which S.S. Visitor wrote for in *The Colored American* in 1841, a mother gives her



**Figure 2.4:** Charting marble articles by genre and date indicates that, overall, there more articles in the 1850s and 1860s than in other decades. The median date for stories for children is somewhat earlier than the median date for moralistic and religious pieces.

young girl permission to get out of her obligations and spend a week playing and behaving as free as a kitten. However, the girl soon loses her taste for kittenhood. She becomes cut off from the social life that she enjoys and renounces her experiment before the week is up when she realizes that she cannot go to Sunday school. Her duties to her family, sewing and doing chores, she decides, are necessary sacrifices for both her social and spiritual benefit. After all, “kittens, and all such things had no souls, and could not go to heaven when they died.” Afterwards, Visitor writes, “Mary became an industrious girl” and did as her mother told her.

Three other stories replicate a common narrative structure that compares two boys, one who studies hard and another who plays all the time. Inevitably, the boy who works and studies hard as a child grows up to be quite successful while the lazy boy does not. The first version of this parable appears in *The North Star* in 1849 (Arthur 1849). Here, both boys see themselves a bound for trades but only the one heeds his parents’ advice to study hard and learn as much as he can regardless of his expectations for his career. The other ignores the teacher and secretly plays with marbles under his desk. His learning suffers accordingly. The story jumps ahead to the boys as age thirty-five and the first, hardworking boy has become a successful merchant who is able to offer employment to his comrade, a poor journeyman who can barely feed his family. “What Is Your Aim? A Story for Boys,” which appears in *The Christian Recorder* in 1862 (Mennie 1862), follows a similar structure, starting with a pair of school-aged boys and follows them into adulthood. However, Mennie’s iteration adds a further class element to the story because the hardworking and successful boy comes from a poor background while the lazy boy is wealthy, advancing the American ideals of social mobility. Ultimately, this account contains no redemption or mutual aid for the lazy man. “He died without giving evidence of a change of heart...O, that all the youthful readers of this history would take warning from the sad end of this

young man!” In another iteration, a Mrs. C. Knight (1866) celebrates a poor boy who furthers his education in his spare moments instead of frittering away his time. Instead of an active character to serve as a lazy foil, the author here imagines that the many men locked away in prison might reflect, “In my spare moments I gambled for marbles. In my spare moments I began to smoke and drink. It was in my spare moments that I gathered wicked associates.” Essentially, all three stories offer two very distinct pathways for their readers and cast so much shadow over the one so as to scare children into good behavior. Marbles here represent excessive play and irresponsibility.

Other tales to encourage hard work and responsibility share elements with this stock parable. “Charles Melrose’s Proverb” (*The Christian Recorder* 1876) contains no opposing foil character, but the titular Charley skips out on his homework to join his friends playing and gathering chestnuts. He again regrets his actions later. In “Jamie’s Struggle,” (*The Christian Recorder* 1862), a boy defies his uncle’s assumption that no boy can go without candies or marbles for six whole months by scrimping and saving to buy his sister a dress, for which he wins his family’s affection. Again, here, the writers urge that marbles and their play take a back seat to study and hard work.

Other articles and stories, however, cast marbles in a more positive light and encourage play as a proper activity for children. There is, of course, the aforementioned (1839a) essay in *The Colored American* encouraging parents to let their children enjoy a few years of pure play for a time before putting all sorts of responsibilities and obligations on them. In addition, a mother writing in 1867 for *The Christian Recorder* laments for the youth of her boy and her life as it was when he was young: “I want to make little flags, and bags to hold marbles. I want to be followed by little feet all over the house; teased for a bit of dough for a little cake, or to bake a

pie in a saucer.” She encourages all mothers to cherish their children when they are childlike and enjoy the time while it lasts (*Christian Recorder* 1867). Similarly, a poem in the same periodical celebrates with glee the sound of play: “Now hear the tops and marbles roll!/The floors-Oh who betide them!/And I must watch the banisters,/For I know boys who ride them!” (W. 1872). In another story, an uncle shows his niece how to “make your own sunshine” on a rainy day by making fun with what you have, including dolls out of newspaper and rolling a marble around a tea tray. These authors acknowledge that parenting comes with its work and its duties but decidedly come down on the side of these being well-worthwhile sacrifices for the joy that children have and bring. Play is, here, a thing to be encouraged.

Because these articles of contrasting viewpoints often appear within the same publications and because they overlap chronologically, there is tension somewhat between pieces that encourage hard work and the abandonment of play and others that endorse play. Some writers attempted to reconcile this tension by setting apart certain times or periods for play. In 1862, *The Christian Recorder* printed a short story by British novelist Elizabeth Sara Sheppard entitled “The Children’s Cities.” This parable tells of three princes who inherited three cities from their father: Lessonland, Pastime, and Confection. When they tried dividing themselves and their population of child-people between the three cities, things went badly but, when they all together spent part of each day between study, play, and eating, things went much better. Sheppard and the *Recorder*’s editors used this story to encourage a time for play and a time for study among the hours of a child’s life.

Other writers reconciled responsibility and play by confining them to separate chapters of life. One article in *The Christian Recorder* (1866a) envisions all the possibilities of “What the Child May Become” when they grow up and argues that the passage of time makes things of the

past seem insignificant, especially when looking toward death and heaven: “May not the period come...when the employments and the gains and splendors of earth will seem to be of no more account than do the rattlebox or the marbles of the child?” Another piece a year later in the same paper continues this line of thought, wondering how many children playing with marbles might grow up into a Napoleon and shape the world through their acts (Spear 1867). African-American journalist, teacher, and activist Gertrude Bustill (1878) encapsulates this theme in a poem that ran in *The Christian Recorder* about small things that can grow to have a great impact:

Only a boy, with his frolic and fun  
His marbles, and tops, and miniature gun,  
But time rolls by and leaves in his stead  
The man, tender of heart, and wise of head

Only a girl, with her dolls and play,  
Her loving glance, and dainty way  
But the summers have fled with a sweet  
Surprise,  
And a stately maiden gladdens our eyes.

The maiden, now, is the matron, dear,  
That with tender counsel, doth little one  
Rear,  
And we vow in our hearts, our lips shall  
Ne'er curl  
As we scornfully say, "Only a girl"

Bustill parallels the potential of boys and girls with that of flower beds to bloom and a single word to end bitterness, and with that of ideas and of prayers. Like the children's stories, her theme remains potential and her tone hopeful. The writers who take up the theme of growth firmly place marble-playing in the realm of childhood as a social and temporal category separated from responsible adulthood, though one that is always temporary and gives way to greater things. This association makes possible J.M. Eells' (1851) diatribe against politicians,

where he condemns the politicians of the day specifically because they have failed to outgrow their days of playing marbles and to take up seriously the matters of state and society.

Whatever their thoughts on the appropriate time for playing marbles, many writers agreed that Sundays were not it. Moralistic and religious writings about marbles focus a great many words against their play on the Sabbath and these opinions were not confined to church publications like *The Christian Recorder*. In 1854, *The Provincial Freeman* published a piece from *The New York Tribune* by a family who, arriving in New York City, complained about the hustle and din and distraction that New York's urban life offered. Among the distractions on a particular Sunday was their son's classmate playing marbles in the street outside their house. Ultimately, the parents decided that New York was a poor place to bring up children or for adults to try to spend the Sabbath (*Provincial Freeman* 1854a). The next year, *The National Era* published a story on a minister who, leaving his church, encounters a group of boys playing marbles and swearing, who talk smack to him (*National Era* 1855a). In 1856, a William C. Tanner of Mt. Clements, Michigan, wrote to *The Provincial Freeman* to complain of "Sabbath Desecration." He specifically condemns people playing marbles, in the same breath as he condemns "pitching quates," or gambling, and taking the Lord's name in vain. In children he argues, such things lead to further vice.

The proposed solution to the evil of marbles on Sundays was Sunday school. Rev. Robert B. Bookens of the African Methodist Episcopal Church wrote to the denomination's paper in 1877 from Florida to celebrate the advance of Sunday schools throughout the South after the end of the Civil War. "Our children that once roamed the woods and the streets in hunt of some bird's nest or wild animal, and in the street playing bail [sic.] or shooting marbles on a Sabbath morning," he writes, "are now crowded in the hallowed walls of the Sabbath School."

The importance of Sunday schools for children became a recurring theme in *The Christian Recorder*. In 1880, Rev. J.T. Hayslett lamented that even the children of churchgoing parents in Norristown, Pennsylvania, did not know and observe the sabbath, for they were left at home to play marbles on Sundays when their parents went to worship. In 1882, Helen J. Clark of Clarinda, Iowa, stressed to parents the importance of sending their children to Sunday schools. She echoes Bookens' earlier fear of time spent instead playing marbles and fishing and hanging out with "all kinds of bad boys" and cursing, which together will lead boys to grow up badly. By the end of the nineteenth century, Sunday schools were well-established around much of the country. Yet, members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church continued to concern themselves with the quality and support of this form of education. Mattie L. Holmes of Jonesboro, Arkansas, wrote to her fellow African Methodists in 1899 to remind them of the time before there were any Sunday schools, in which young men would spend Sundays in competitions of marbles, wrestling, dance, and "act on the poles," while young ladies would skip, dance, and jump rope. It is not always clear that Holmes and the other writers take issue with these typical children's activities in and of themselves, but they clearly protested their taking place on the day reserved for pious worship, prayer, and reflection.

African-American children fairly wholeheartedly rejected any wholesale diatribes against marbles. They may have curtailed their use of them on Sundays in favor of Sunday schools, but marbles continued to remain one of the most abundant types of toys. Writings against and about them in the United States' black-owned newspapers attest to their continued use nationally. In Easton, the quantity of marbles recovered in archaeological contexts only increased over the course of the nineteenth century. Population growth and increased residential density meant more children and these children continued to play with marbles as they ever had before.



Marbles remained popular in part because they themselves were so cheap to buy and because no other tools were required to play the game. With a stick to draw a circle in the dirt or a piece of chalk to mark one out where there was pavement, children could play marbles anywhere. As Yvonne Freeman recalls, “You didn’t need much to play marbles. All you needed was dirt...and you drew a circle and the game was on! And you could play all day. You could play all day—until you lost all your marbles” (oral history interview October 17, 2018).

Children even played marbles on church property, though archaeologically it is impossible to know whether they obeyed the directive against playing them on Sundays. The children who used Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church’s tabernacle and grounds for their playground didn’t seem to mind religious invectives against marbles too much, for the toys show up in abundance here, in each of the test units excavated in 2016. During this fieldwork at the site, an old resident of the neighborhood pointed to the big tree that marks the boundary of the church property and the houses on Kelley Gibson Street, saying, “We used to play marbles over there against the tree.” Yet, religious complaints against marbles and marble-playing, particularly on Sundays, were so widespread in the nineteenth century that the children growing up on The Hill in those times were sure to have heard them.

Although it may be said that free play is not altogether fitting with the decorum of piety that the Sabbath demands, ministers and other religious writers draw their approbation of marbles on Sundays largely from the association of the game with gambling. Holmes’ issue with marbles in her (1899) article specifically denotes the problem being the competitiveness with which children approached the game. A news story from 1848 presents a somewhat less clear case. In this instance, *The North Star* (1848a) shared a Connecticut newspaper’s report of a fight breaking out amongst some African Americans somewhere in the South over a game of marbles,

after which a group of white men upset at the disturbance of the Sabbath proceeded to leave their game of backgammon and punish the combatants with a whipping. The piece, entitled “The South as It Is,” is structured to highlight the irony of violence as a solution to violence and the white men’s hypocrisy in their claims to defending the sanctity of the Sabbath. The fight and the whipping take the center stage in this account. However, it is impossible to overlook the secondary parallel of the white men playing backgammon on a Sunday while the African Americans played marbles. Both games commonly involved gambling. So neither group, apparently gambling on Sunday, had much moral high ground on that score either.

Playing marbles did not necessarily involve gambling for money but, cheap as marbles were, they still cost money and playing for keeps was a minor form of gambling. In one story for children from 1862, a boy tells his mother that he has won all his friend’s marbles through playing for keeps. She reminds him that his mate must have paid for the marbles. ““So now you have got a dollar’s worth of marbles for nothing,”” she tells him. The boy protests that he played fair and square. However, ““Mr. Lowly,’ continued his mother, ‘is a gambler, and he wins other people’s money in the same way. He plays “upon the square,” he says.’” The tale ends with the boy promising never to play for keeps again (*Christian Recorder* 1862c). Whether one takes into consideration marbles’ market value, low as it was, or their commodity value in and of themselves within the world of children, playing for keeps is very much a form of gambling. It involves the same risk-and-reward structure, requiring the player to put out their own marbles and rely on their skill or their luck to win more than they lost. Should they lose all their marbles, they become forced to spend either money to buy more or social capital to borrow some in order to keep playing. Success at the game meant a greater ability to put out risk without fear of losing all one’s marbles. Marbles in this way served as a sort of currency among boys and others who

played them. Playing for keeps was relatively benign economically, given the low cost and easy availability of replacement marbles. However, social prestige among children could be won and lost by one's fate in the marble ring (Holmes 1899) and that can be a far more significant form of capital at a young age.

Entreaties against gambling, both direct and understood inherently in complaints about keeping the Sabbath holy, occurred both frequently and throughout the period represented in the sample of articles. The amount of time and newspaper ink that adults devoted to combating this vice demonstrates the broad spread of the practice. Children clearly refused to buy into the moral demands that these authors expected. From a child's perspective, playing for keeps—or gambling—makes the game more fun because it gives it objective and risk. It also constructed, within the play of marbles, an entry point for children into the adult world of risk and reward. The game itself involves turning one's opponent's plays to one's own advantage. While parents may have hoped that children would return the marbles they won at the end of a game and take away a lesson about sharing and not gambling with one's money, seen from another perspective, marbles teach children that one cannot get something for nothing and that a little risk is required to gain in life.

Other writers seized on marbles' dual role as property that came with a purchase cost and as currency in order to convey messages against cheating and theft through stories aimed at children. The first of these ran in *The Christian Recorder* in 1866 and its author, who signs the piece "SOLO," depicts a boy who empties out his pockets and puts his things under his pillow when he sleeps. He dreams that the toys talk to one another of all his misdeeds. While these are many, the marbles testify specifically to his cheating: "Fred don't play fairly...If the other boys don't see his miss, he lets it pass; and then he takes advantage of the smaller boys. That's such a

mean trick!” Fred wakes up and decides to behave better after such a dream. As poor sportsmanship cheating is, so, too, is picking up what you know belongs to someone else.

Another story makes just such a point, in which a mother chides her son for taking marbles that do not belong to him:

“I took that glass marble, mamma.”

“Took it from whom?” asked his mother.

“I took it from the ground,” said Johnny.

“Did it belong to the ground?” asked his mother: “did the ground go to the shop and buy it?”

The boy’s mother finally teases out of him his knowledge of who the marble probably belonged to and reminds him that Jesus is always watching even if the other boy doesn’t know that his marble has been stolen (*The Christian Recorder* 1873b).

On a final note, one story for children conveys in poetic terms how interconnected everyone is, to the extent that what is good for one person is often good for many. A young girl tells her father that she hopes the river will rise. Upon inquiry, he learns that she understands that the river rising means that he can sell his cotton and make enough money for a whole series of family members to pay their debts, ultimately down to her: ““Sister Jane would pay brother John his fifty century back, and he said when he got it he would give me the half dime he owes me, and two dimes to buy marbles; and this is what I want the river to rise for, and the big boats to run.”” The author of this piece demonstrates through the girl’s clever logic how what benefits one person gets handed down the line to the benefit of many. ““We are all,”” concludes the father in the story, ““old and young, waiting for money to buy marbles”” (*The Christian Recorder* 1873a).

Children and others on The Hill playing with the marbles that archaeologists have recovered most likely did not keep these moral messages constantly in mind while playing.

After all, the common theme of play runs through all of these depictions and discussions of the game in the African-American newspapers of the period and binds them together. However, it is possible to imagine on occasion a parent in the evening taking their child on their lap and reading them some of these stories from the latest newspaper, as indeed the stories were meant to be shared in just such this way. This would probably have been more common in middle-class households, which were more interconnected with the discourses of the free black press. Given the involvement of at least some free African Americans from Easton with the papers, people living on The Hill most likely did read these stories to their children. Marbles are one of the most ubiquitous types of toy and certainly that most well-represented in the archaeological record in part because of their durability. As children generation after generation on The Hill played with them, they may have born in mind at least some of these lessons that their parents and their community used to teach them the lessons—of responsibility and work, of fun and balance, of piety, and of morality—they believed most essential to children’s success.

In their moral concern over marbles, the middle-class African Americans who edited newspapers in the nineteenth century reflected much the same conversation going on in middle-class white America. Indeed, the period’s discourse around marbles is a rather integrated one between the white and black communities. 21 of the 49 references to marbles in the African-American newspapers were reprints that editors had selected from white-run publications (*Colored American* 1839a; *Colored American* 1840; USDS 1840c:216; *Colored American* 1841; *National Era* 1847; Arthur 1848:16–22; *North Star* 1848a; Arthur 1849; *North Star* 1849; Irving 1852a; *Provincial Freeman* 1854a; *Christian Recorder* 1862d; *Christian Recorder* 1866a; SOLO 1866; Spear 1867; *Christian Recorder* 1868; *Christian Recorder* 1869a; *Christian Recorder* 1869b; W. 1872; O. 1876; *Christian Recorder* 1888a; Phlieger 2018). Meanwhile, the *New York*

*Times* printed a story in 1882 from Virginia's *Scotsville Courier* of an African-American Baptist pastor charging 22 young members of his church to pledge before God "not to play ball or marbles" (*New York Times* 1882:5). The nineteenth-century discourse on marbles, therefore, was a unified conversation across racial lines.

Two articles representing white contributions to the discourse on marbles offer some additional details about the national discourse on the toy by counterposing the familiar moral objections by some with both benevolent indifference and even avid approval by others. When aging (New York City Municipal Deaths 1895) toy store owner Franklin Schumway had five of his neighborhood's boys arrested for playing marbles on their street on a Sunday in 1894, he voiced the common refrain that "you were on the road to Sing Sing [New York's infamous prison]...you were on the road to perdition." The boys, for their part, aged 10 to 15, worked six days a week to provide for their families. As such, they found this middle-class anti-playing morality fairly unconvincing. The reporter covering the story noted that neither the arresting officer, nor the judge who decided their hearing had much against the playing of marbles, both of them being fathers. The judge pretty summarily dismissed all charges, with the comment that, "the lads have got to play some time, you know." The reporter covering the story also voices sympathy, titling the article, "Franklin Schumway Did Not Want Them to be Happy on Sunday" (*New York Times* 1894:2). That a crotchety old white man managed to have his working-class neighbors arrested simply for playing marbles—or, in his terms, for being *on the road* to misbehavior and crime—speaks to the power of middle-class moralism in the late nineteenth century. Much of the African-American literature of the period takes part in this middle-class fear. However, the disposition of the officer and the dismissive words of the judge indicate that, however negative recorded public discourses might have been toward marble-

playing, adults by-and-large allowed it as a harmless activity. This was most likely the case in African-American neighborhoods as well, given the persistence of marbles in the material record.

In addition to mildly benevolent indifference to whatever ill effects marbles might have, the toys also had vocal defenders. A *Kansas City Times* reporter picked up the outline of a rigorous endorsement for marble-playing in 1888 among a meeting of public school principals:

At the meeting of the Principals of the public schools held in April the question of 'playing keeps' was discussed at considerable length. There was no difference of opinion in regard to boys playing marbles as a game of skill and for amusement and recreation, but the moral phase involved in 'keeps' as a species of gambling was the point of disagreement. The question of debate was more particularly one of suppressing or of prohibiting playing about the school premises. Quite a large number of the Principals look upon the game of 'keeps,' when played for marbles, as positively immoral and decidedly vicious and demoralizing in all its tendencies. The other side claimed that while there were doubtless some objectionable features to the game, repression or prohibition is not the proper remedy. There are rules by which the boys are governed in this game as well as all other games, and that this game is simply a miniature phase of life's trials and contests, and that since a boy must learn to take care of himself sooner or later, he might get the first lessons in playing keeps now as well as later on in life. The marble-playing season lasts a portion of the year only, and the boys that play now will soon be too big to play, and the effect is only a passing stage of development that leaves slight traces in after years. As an evidence that it is not immoral to any appreciable extent, they instanced church fairs, where tickets are sold by chance and prizes are raffled for and votes for ugly men and handsome women are cast in profusion—all games of chance and not on so high a plane of skill as a well-conducted game of marbles. Then, the horse races at the annual fairs, another species of chance work, are patronized and popularized by all classes of good citizens. Also indoor social games—such as whist, euchre, progressive euchre, and so on—are games of chance more than of skill, if honest playing is done. Neither did they hesitate to put speculation in corner lots upon a different basis from that employed by the shrewd boy in generalizing a game of 'keeps.' From a mind standpoint they claimed that two natures are in the boy, one his intellectual and moral nature and the other the selfish nature, and that both are susceptible of cultivation and direction, but that neither should be suppressed. The destruction of the selfish nature signified the crushing of all aspirations and the annihilation of all motives, which effeminate the masculine mind. And further, the necessary result of suppression or strict prohibition could have but one tendency, namely, to teach dishonesty and deception, which would lead to playing keeps in back alleys and other out-of-the-way places (*New York Times* 1888:4).

It is difficult here to tell at which point the opinion of one of more principals ends and that of the reporter begins. Read either way, however, this article presents a shining defense of marble-playing on the very points of competition and chance that raise so much ire among the game's plentiful detractors. The chauvinistic comment about the effeminization of "the masculine mind" is somewhat interesting, given that girls competed in their own pursuits (Holmes 1899). However, given marbles' predominant association with boys and also with playing for keeps, the toy may have particularly served to support differential gender expectations that fit in well with the separate spheres ideology of black and white middle-class America at the time—the male sphere of business and politics outside the home as contrasted with a nurturing and supportive domestic femininity.

On a more basic and perhaps more important level, the marble proponents here emphasize competitive and risk-taking games' educational roles in preparing children—mainly boys—for an adult world in which these factors will very much play a role in their lives. This line of reasoning resembles the effort to use stories about marbles to impart moral lessons, except in two vital ways. The first is that its lessons are realism rather than idealism, practical instead of moral. The second is that the lesson is hardwired into the game itself rather than standing apart and often against it, as the stories for children do, and therefore operates quite aptly on a subconscious basis without any need for interference from adults. Indeed, lessons of risk and reward and the establishment of social hierarchy through skill and luck are probably the most integral takeaways that anyone who plays marbles receives. The game need not preach, for its realities are hard-learned through winning and losing. A boy need not hear from his mother that gambling is dangerous after he has but once lost his last marble to a lucky throw by his opponent.



For children in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, whose lives would be ruled by the market forces of an as-yet fairly unrestrained capitalism, such lessons in risk, skill, and luck would have been keenly relevant. Capitalism, after all, relies on risk. The capitalist who holds onto his money or his machines will find himself eventually outpaced by competitors who invest in new engines (Harvey 1989:18). The worker's life is less ruled by the personal risks he takes, though from a particular perspective in this era before factory safety his daily wages come with some degree of risk to his health. In like fashion, the cheapest way to get more marbles is to win them. Life in a capitalist market inevitably involves risks that rely on skill but, also, on luck because the forces driving opportunity, profits, and income are largely beyond the control of any particular person and the bust after the boom cannot be avoided. This was true especially for boys and men, who the gender ideals of the time expected to be more directly engaged with the market economy. However, for the working classes and for most people of color, women who also worked would know these lessons as well as men.

Capitalism, embodied partially in playing for keeps, may have contributed to the popularity of that form of marble-playing during the rise of industrial capitalism in the United States—maintaining the popularity of the gaming style in the face of the moralistic critiques levied against it. African Americans participated in both sides of this debate, sharing in the national discourse of moral concern while also using marbles to impart a variety of messages to children who, for their part, continued ever to play with the little balls. At the same time, German producers of glass and clay marbles capitalized on the toy's popularity and came to dominate the nineteenth-century market for marbles (Baumann 2004). In the early twentieth century, American entrepreneurs mechanized the mass production of glass marbles and increased their popularity through national tournaments (Chetwynd 2011:91). In the twentieth century, the

moral concerns over marbles faded away (Chetwynd 2011:91). As American capitalism shifted form nationally and the economic life of Easton transformed after the arrival of Rt. 50 in the middle of the twentieth century, marbles and playing for keeps continued strong among children on The Hill (Yvonne Freeman, personal interview October 17, 2018), bringing its lessons about risk, skill, and luck to new generations of Eastoners.

### *Reading to children as a community effort*

Free African Americans in Easton in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have been able to read these stories to their children and to use these printed discourses as resources as they raised their children. Besides the clear evidence of subscription and involvement with the African-American newspapers of the period, the census provides additional evidence of literacy in this study period.<sup>24</sup> Although there are some issues with the census data, literacy was not uncommon and grew over time. The age, sex, and family distributions of literacy suggest that reading to children required a communal effort in which African-American

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<sup>24</sup> The censuses present some inconsistencies in the reporting of literacy, which complicates direct comparisons. The 1850 census, which was the first to list people individually, reports whether an individual attended school within the preceding year and marked illiterate adults of age 20 or older. In 1870, the census reports the literacy rates of both adults and children. It also repeats the previous designation of whether an individual attended school in the preceding year. Literacy is reported as check marks under columns marked “cannot read” and “cannot write.” In 1870, it seems reasonable to interpret blanks as marks of literacy and writing ability. In 1850, there are too many blanks for this to be the case. The 1900 census denotes whether people were able to read, whether they could write, and whether they had attended school at any time between September 1, 1909 and the time of the individual’s enumeration. Instead of check marks as in 1850 and 1870, responses were either “yes,” “no,” or blank. By and large, blanks in the reading and writing skills columns correspond to children; however, approximately half of children received marks as to their reading and writing abilities. It is unclear whether blanks in the schooling column mean the same thing as a “no.” The schooling column was left blank for almost all adults, though 102 residents in their twenties received “no” entries. Among children aged 0 to 9, half were left blank. This proportion dropped to less than half of 1% in the age 10 to 19 cohort. Therefore, the statistics on children’s education and literacy are less straightforward than those for adults. These three sample years for the town of Easton give a general sense of literacy rates among adults and children, as well as the amount and quality of the education free African Americans, as well as their white neighbors, were able to access.

women's motherwork played a large role. Because African Americans in Easton, as was often the case elsewhere, possessed lower levels of literacy than their white neighbors, they had to draw broader social networks in order to connect literate community members with nonliterate ones—essentially pooling their literacy resources. The strength of Easton's connection with African-American newspapers of the period is evidence that they did so.

In 1870, 94% of white adults were able to read, but only 23% of African American adults.<sup>25</sup> 92% of white adults could write, compared to 19% of African-American adults. This is a similar disparity to reading ability but both numbers are slightly smaller. Even though the extremely high rates of literacy among free African Americans in 1850 are suspect, literacy rates among this population most likely did decline significantly with the emancipation of all remaining enslaved African Americans, whose education and, especially, literacy were systematically discouraged during the nineteenth century by slave owners. Lower literacy rates in 1870 represent the legacies of slavery and posed a challenge that African-American communities in Easton and elsewhere worked to address in the postbellum period.

In 1910, only 54% of African-American adults in Easton were literate, while 96% of white adults could read. The disparity was even larger for writing skills: 95% of white adults could write but only 47% of African-American adults. Despite the size of the disparity in literacy between the races, by 1910, that gulf had shrunk by 29 percentage points from the rates in 1870. White adults had made a small increase of 2 points, being already close to universal literacy, while African-American adults more than doubled literacy rates in these forty years,

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<sup>25</sup> Census records on literacy are available as early as 1850. According to the census, Easton in 1850 boasted an adult literacy rate of 98%: 96% for white adults and 100% for free African-American adults. However, marks were made for illiteracy rather than for literacy. Given substantially less than universal school attendance (see below), these statistics seem improbable for the period. It is therefore likely that a large number of marks were not made in the illiteracy column when they should have been. Therefore, the literacy rates reported in this document are untrustworthy. The same method was used in 1870, but the resulting statistics for that year are more realistic.

achieving tremendous progress although still just barely over half could read and fewer than half could write.

Although African-Americans faced low—though improving—literacy at the individual level, African-American households fared somewhat better than individuals by drawing on the total skillsets of their members. Based on the above issues with adult literacy rates in 1850, I did not assess household literacy rates for that year. In 1870, 34% of African-American households included at least one literate adult. By 1910, this proportion had risen to 68%. The white community also marginally improved literacy rates at the household level—from 98% of households including a literate adult in 1870 to 99% in 1910—virtually closing the distance to universal literacy when considering skills at the household level. In both years and for both communities, it was more likely for a household to include a literate adult member than for an adult individually to be able to read.

Having at least one literate adult in the household meant greater access by children to information and stories transmitted from written sources orally. In 1870, 54% of African-American children lived in households where at least one adult could read. This proportion rose by 1910 to 70%. These rates are higher than those for African-American households in general, regardless of the presence of children, containing at least one literate adult. Does this mean that families that were literate had more children? Or does it mean that families with children were more likely to be literate? The difference can be determined by considering, on the one hand, the correlation between number of children in literate and illiterate households, and, on the other, literacy rates in households with and without children. The data do not support the first possibility. When African-American households are charted either according to the number of literate adults in the household or the literacy rate within the household regardless of the number

of adults, there is no consistent trend in the number of children present in the household. The Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient for the relationship between the number of literate adults in African-American households and the number of children in those households is 0.4389. This is a positive but weak correlation. The  $r$  value for the relationship between whether households had children and the literacy rate of adults is not possible to calculate because whether a family had children is a binary data set—yes or no. African-American households with children had approximately 9% greater adult literacy (55% versus 46%) than those without children. It may be the case, therefore, that having children prompted adults to improve their literacy. However, the data are not definitive as to this point. Meanwhile, a consistent 99% of white children in both years enjoyed in-household access to one or more literate adults.

Improvements in adult literacy among African Americans over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant greater and more direct access for African-American children to someone who could read to them. Children without access to literate adults in their own households may have, in such a close-knit community, been read to by other adults in neighboring houses or at church, as well as at school when education was available. White children may also have been read to by people in their broader social networks. However, this practice was not as important for them because they had readier access to literate adults inside their own households.

Some children could also, themselves, read. The 1850 census does not provide data on childhood literacy because it records only illiteracy after age 20. However, in 1870, assuming that blanks do indicate proficiency, 74% of African-American children could read—more than triple the reading proficiency among African-American adults. The literacy rate among white children, 98%, was slightly higher than that among white adults. Of course, it is possible that

these rates are both inflated because of incorrect blank marks in the census record. Nevertheless, African-American children clearly outstripped their adult relatives in literacy. These relative rates between children and adults provided the basis for the aforementioned increases in adult literacy.

In 1910, at least 51% of African-American children could also, themselves, read.<sup>26</sup> At least 54% of white children, in comparison, could read. I view these proportions with some skepticism, considering the dramatic decreases they both suggest from 1870 to 1910 while adult literacy improved for both races. Therefore, childhood literacy in 1910 may well have been greater than it appears through the census.

Racial disparities in literacy stemmed largely from unequal access to education. According to the census, 29% of white children in Easton attended school in 1850, compared to 0.67% (1 individual) for African-American children. Given the probable issue with adult literacy rates in this document, the statistics on educational attendance should be approached with caution. However, they are believable for the period. The census depicts tremendous difficulty in attaining education for free African Americans and their virtually complete exclusion from Easton's educational facilities. What instruction they did receive would have had to come from family members, friends, and, importantly, from churches. For more on the role of African-American churches in education, see Chapter 3.

By 1870, African-American in Easton had a school they could attend and 23% of them did so. White children attended at higher rates, though a majority of white children still did not attend school at that time. By 1910, school attendance had risen for both groups: 47% of

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<sup>26</sup> Although it is unclear whether blank spaces in the census indicate that a child could not read or that the census-taker did not bother asking the question, he indicated the literacy of 164 African-American children, representing 51% of that population group.

African-American children and 52% of white children. African Americans made the larger educational gain, closing most of the racial gap. The gains in literacy for African Americans are most likely the product chiefly of the work of the Easton Colored School (see Chapter 3).

Nevertheless, the quality of African-American children's education remained lower than that which white students could access. The quality of education cannot be determined from the 1850 census because of a lack of data on childhood literacy. However, in 1870, among children who attended school, 98% of white children and 84% of African-American children could read. Literacy rates were therefore substantially higher among students than non-students, regardless of race. However, a gap persisted. This racial gap is still evident, though somewhat smaller, in 1910, when 76% of white children who attended school could read, versus 71% for African-American students. It is possible that these numbers should both be higher, given the aforementioned skepticism with which I view children's literacy statistics for 1910. Although the education they received was of a lower quality, it still greatly benefitted African-American children and worked toward lowering both general illiteracy and the disparity between the races.

It is not news that African Americans suffered less access to, and poorer-quality, education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is remarkable, however, is how widespread literacy actually was among families of color during this period. The average African-American child in Easton from at least the Civil War onward would have been able to expect someone in their household to read to them until they themselves learned to read. Literacy formed the basis for access to newspapers, including those run by African Americans, and the news and stories they contained, which helped to give meaning to the material world in which children found themselves and which they crafted.

Because literacy rates among African Americans in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Easton and Talbot County were well below universal, even with gains throughout the period, reading to children would have been a communal effort. Relative gender parity in literacy for African Americans meant that men and women were capable of playing equal roles in reading to children. However, because of family structures, mothers, grandmothers, and older daughters often supplied this role.

In the nineteenth century, African-American men and boys in Easton were slightly more likely than African-American women and girls to be able to read, but the differences were not great. In 1870, the census indicated that 21% of adult women and 26% of adult men could read. Among children, where literacy was higher, a similarly small disparity could be seen. 71% of girls could read, compared with 78% of boys. Although the higher rate of literacy among males than females was consistent across these age groupings, the gaps of 5% and 7% were not sufficient to cause major social repercussions. In the vast majority of African-American households, either adults of both sexes or neither could read. It is impossible to speak to the literacy of husbands and wives, of fathers and mothers, directly because the census in this year does not specify household relationships between members. However, these data would suggest that African-Americans married spouses of similar educational background and literacy to themselves. In the 20% of households where only an adult or adults of one sex could read, the household was 14% more likely to include literate males than literate females. When considering only those households where children were also present, the disparity shrinks to 8% more likely to include literate males than females. This would suggest that, where only one parent was literate, that literate parent was slightly more likely to be the father than the mother. However, the disparity affected a small number of children. On the whole, African-American



literacy at the family level respected the gender parity in the population as a whole. By 1910, African-American adults in Easton were literate at the same rate of 54%, regardless of sex. However, despite the fairly equal *capability* of fathers and mothers to read to their children, this task fell primarily to the women of the household.

African-American women in nineteenth-century Easton were more likely than their male partners to stay at home and care for children. When both parents worked, it was often a grandmother or older daughter who was “at home” with the children. For example, 18-year-old Louisa Nicols stayed at home with three younger sisters and a younger brother while her single mother and older sister worked as domestics (USBC 1870:23). Although Alice Goldsboro stayed at home to keep house while her husband worked as a farmhand, her oldest daughter Sarah, 18, also was at home and presumably helped care for the family’s other five children (USBC 1870:33). Women staying at home also stepped in to help neighboring families where all the adults worked outside of the home. African-American families therefore relied heavily on extended family and community networks of “othermothers” to care for children. The census’ designation of the labor of these women, as well as of mothers staying “at home,” is consistent with the notion of *motherwork*, recognizing the communal labor that these women put into raising children. The implication of this inter-household work, to care for and raise children, for reading to children from newspapers and other media was the pooling of collective resources. Although, in 1870, 54% of African-American children had access to at least one literate adult in their own household, community support networks for childrearing meant that the actual percentage of children with everyday access to a literate adult was much higher. For those families—particularly those who were middle-class—who had ready access to the discourses in the literature of the free black press, reading to children was most likely a part of these

community-level efforts to bring up the next generation and to impart to them morals that would lead them through life.

### *Women writers*

Middle-class African-American women of the nineteenth century, like middle-class white women, not only took on a major role in reading to children and passing on the moral messages in stories, essays, and other genres of writing, but they also wrote some of these pieces themselves. Women played a significant role in authorship of the pieces in this sample, particularly in the writing of stories for children. Moralistic and religious writings were submitted mainly by men, often ministers.

Among the five stories for children (out of 18 total) where the gender of an author could be determined either by positive identification of the author's identity or by the predominant gender affiliation of their first name, four were written by women. A Mrs. C. Knight wrote "Spare Moments" for the *Christian Recorder* (Knight 1866). She was likely a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, since there is no indication that the church's newspaper borrowed and reprinted the piece from a white publication. "What Is Your Aim? A Story for Boys" (Mennie 1862) is signed, simply, "MENNIE." This could be a surname or a female first name. As with "Spare Moments," "What Is Your Aim" appears to have been written for the *Christian Recorder*. Therefore, Mennie was probably an African-American author.

The publication also published stories by white women. "The Children's Cities" (*Christian Recorder* 1862d) is attributed to "the author of 'Charles Auchester.'" This was Elizabeth Sarah Sheppard, an English novelist (Upton 1891). In the same year as "The

Children's Cities," the *Christian Recorder* also published "Jamie's Struggle" (Palmer 1862) It attributed the story to Lynde Palmer, the pen name of Mary Louise Peebles, a white children's writer from New York (Library of Congress N.d.a). The fifth author identifiable by gender was Timothy Shay Arthur, a white temperance advocate from New York whose "The Use of Learning" appeared in *The North Star* in 1849. It is unlikely that Shay wrote his piece for this abolitionist paper, since it appeared in a section titled "Selections," meaning selections from other publications (Arthur 1849). Thus, African-American newspaper editors published stories for children by African-American women as well as stories by white men and women.

In addition to the children's stories, African-American women also contributed at least four other articles in the sample here, including a poem by African-American writer, journalist, teacher, and activist Gertrude Bustill (Bustill 1878; Salo 2008) and two essays on Sunday schools by Mattie Holmes (1899) and Helen J. Clark (1882), who may likely have been members of the A.M.E. Church since *the Christian Recorder* attributed neither essay to initial publication elsewhere. The final identifiable female author was white: Mary Irving supplied a moralistic parable to promote temperance, which the *National Era* republished from *The Friend of Youth* (Irving 1852a).

It is possible, of course, that the use of pen names may cover up further women's involvement by concealing writers' real identities. This was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was more common for women to claim male pseudonyms and rare for men to do the reverse. I have been able to work out some of the pseudonyms used by authors in this sample but many authors escaped identification. Therefore, the participation of women as authors for these pieces may be underestimated. While I could identify only eight women authors in the sample, compared with twelve male authors and a majority unidentified, women—and particularly women of color—

made significant contributions to the pages of these publications, especially in regard to stories for children.

Women also worked as editors, selecting some of the content of these publications. Men dominated this field—among African American editors as well as white editors. However, a few women broke through into the ranks of the nineteenth century's editors. The *Provincial Freeman* was created in 1853 by Mary Ann Shadd, the first black woman editor and publisher in North America, with the help of former slave and abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward. Shadd was born free in Wilmington, Delaware and eventually made her home in Canada West, where she ran a school for children in the sizeable community of escaped slaves who made their way to the northern, Canadian terminus of the Underground Railroad. She and her publication moved between Windsor, Toronto, and Chatham in what is now southern Ontario. Shadd was initially afraid that, as a woman of color, she would not be taken seriously. So she hid her role as editor-in-chief by running Ward's name as the *Provincial Freeman's* editor, though in truth he only lent his name to the enterprise to garner respect, attention, and subscriptions to get it off the ground. When her editorship became public knowledge, Shadd hired William P. Newman as the official editor in order to avoid losing readership. Still, Shadd remained the publication's driving force and served as an editor for much of its run until its demise in 1859 (Silverman 1990; Rhodes 1999:74–76,89–99). Shadd stood out as a woman even in the field of (mostly male) abolitionists but her determination not to give up the *Provincial Freeman* drove the paper's brief life. Other African-American periodicals in the archive that support this analysis were run by men, the *North Star's* editor Frederick Douglass being the most famous.

African-American editors also drew on publications managed by white men. These included the *Ladies' Repository*, from which the editors of the *Christian Recorder* borrowed the

tale “Minding” (*Christian Recorder* 1868). The *Repository* was run by a series of white, male ministers from the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church, historical parent denomination to the *Recorder*’s A.M.E. Church (*Ladies’ Repository* 1841:i; *Ladies’ Repository* 1876:570). *The Little Folks*, which supplied the *Christian Recorder* (1869a) with “Make Your Own Sunshine: A Story for Mamma to Read Aloud,” was a children’s periodical edited by Edward Eggleston of Chicago. Most sources of reprints, however, were from secular newspapers like the *New York Daily Mirror*, the *New York Tribune*, or the *Philadelphia Ledger*.

Nevertheless, a few women played editing roles in publications that supplied stories reprinted in the collections represented in this study. Margaret L. Bailey of Cincinnati edited *The Friend of Youth*, which was printed in Washington, D.C. It ran from 1849 to 1852. *The Friend of Youth* replaced Bailey’s previous periodical, *Youth’s Monthly Visitor*, which she edited from 1844 to 1846 (Pflieger 2018). Margaret married Gamaliel Bailey in 1833. In 1836, her husband assumed co-editorship of the *Philanthropist*, an abolitionist newspaper. He maintained the *Philanthropist* in the face of violent attacks on his printing office until 1847. In that year, he moved to Washington, D.C., to take control of the *National Era*. Like the *Philanthropist* before it, the *National Era* faced stiff proslavery opposition and at one point a mob besieged the staff in their office for three days. The *National Era* gained wide circulation and the paper carried the first printing of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in serial form in 1851–1852 (Encyclopedia Britannica 1911; Seward Family Digital Archive 2019). It was in these pages that Gamaliel Bailey published Mary Irving’s (1852a) temperance story “Why the Father Began to Drink, and Why He Left off Drinking,” and where it was included in the sample of articles in accessed for this analysis. He reprinted it from his wife Margaret’s *Friend of Youth*, where it had originally appeared.

Men and women, both African-American and European-American, produced the discourse on marbles that attached meaning to these everyday toys and turned the banal plaything into a vehicle for childrearing. Black and white women particularly played key roles as writers of stories for children, while the religious moralism against gambling bore a distinctly male voice. Together, they provided lessons that African-American parents, older siblings, relatives, and neighbors read to young boys in Easton and other African-American communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The messages of mastery over self that marbles conveyed through these stories prepared young black men to take on a world ruled by individualism—as economic actors for themselves and their families and eventually as citizens.

#### Tea Sets and the Making of Domestic Femininity

Pieces from toy tea sets make up a far smaller proportion of The Hill's archaeological assemblage than do ceramic and glass marbles. Of course, whereas marbles have unique designs, ceramic miniature tea sets may blend in with the rest of the ceramics assemblage of any site, particularly when they are broken into tiny sherds. This makes them more difficult to identify. Among the several sites in this study, I have been able to positively identify two complete pieces of toy tea sets and three sherds that are likely to have been parts of other play sets. These come from a former house site on the property of Bethel A.M.E. Church and from the Freeman site.

All of these finds date from domestic contexts from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The intact teacup (Figure 2.5.A) was recovered at the site of one of the mid-nineteenth-century houses constructed on Bethel Church's property while that property was out of the hands of the church. The house stood from the middle of the nineteenth

century until the middle part of the twentieth, when it was demolished and this artifact was deposited in the fill along with other earlier artifacts, which contribute to a mean ceramic date for the test unit and layer of 1804. The other four pieces come from the Freeman site. The intact saucer (Figure 2.5.B) was recovered in a mid-nineteenth-century occupation level, the teacup base fragment (Figure 2.5.C) from a shovel test pit, and the two mending teacup rim sherds (Figure 2.5.D) from a possible mid-twentieth-century fill layer surrounded by strata whose artifact assemblages date from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth. This material was most likely deposited or redeposited when two nineteenth-century houses were torn down but relates to the previous occupation of the site by earlier tenants. The intact teacup from the Bethel Church site and the intact tea saucer from the Freeman site are both close matches for a set of toy teawares dated ca. 1890, although this set had more faceting in the cups from the dated set (McKendry N.d.a). Therefore, 1890 may be a possible date for these two items. Although it has not been possible to pin down all of these material evidences of childhood tea parties more narrowly in the chronology of the neighborhood, they provide a window into what it was like to grow up as a girl here in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It has not been possible to ascertain the identities of all occupants on these two sites during the periods in question. However, it is possible that they were working- or lower middle-class African Americans. The intact toy teacup (Figure 2.5.A) was recovered from a house site on the northeast quadrant of the Bethel A.M.E. Church property. The church was forced to sell the property to one of its trustees, Joseph Chain, in 1827 and he went into bankruptcy in 1830. Between the loss of the property by Chain in 1830 and the church's reacquisition of its land in the 1890s, a number of white owners held portions of the property but likely rented it out. When Chain declared bankruptcy, James Parrott bought Bethel's lot. He divided the lot into parcels

and sold the ground on which the church stood back to the trustees. He sold the other parcels, including the one in question here, to other buyers. Sometime before 1879, E. Jenny Ridgeway came to hold the northeastern parcel and, in that year, the executor of her will sold it back to the church (Schmidt 2014:20–21). However, the chain of title between Parrott and Ridgeway is incomplete. Parrott sold the southern portion of the Bethel property to James Bullitt in 1837 and it eventually ended up in the hands of the Nicols family, who sold it in 1878 to Mary Ann Webb, who deeded it back to the church in 1897 (Schmidt 2014:20–22). Parrott was clerk of the Talbot County Court (USDI 1850a:5b). Bullitt lived in Delaware at the time of purchase before moving to Virginia and in the same stroke also bought a portion of what had been the Freeman property on the block to the west (Talbot County Court 1837–1838:53; Talbot County Court 1841–1842:351). The parcel to the south of the one in question therefore was most likely rented out for at least a portion on the mid-nineteenth century. It is therefore likely that the northeastern parcels had a similar life before Ridgeway obtained it. All of these property owners were white. The identities of the tenants are unknown. The teacup being in mid-to-late-twentieth-century fill from the destruction of that house, the exact date of the toy's arrival at the site is not clear. The house appears to have been built in the mid-nineteenth century, judging by ceramics from the site. It is therefore not possible to definitively tie the toy to a particular owner. If the 1890 date is good, however, African-American ownership of the artifact is likely because, by that time, the church had regained the property and was more likely to rent to African-American tenants than to white tenants. Certainly by 1910, the site was occupied by African Americans (USBC 1910; see Chapter 1, Figure 1.5).

The toy saucer (Figure 2.5.B) was recovered in portion of the Freeman site that is now the backyard of 108 Talbot Lane. When the Freeman family lost the property to back taxes in



1828, the property passed through the hands of several local white men, James Parrott (in 1828), Alexander Bullitt (in 1837), and then Thomas C. Nicols (Schmidt 2016:27). Because of their extensive land dealings in Easton, neither Parrott nor Bullitt is therefore likely to have lived on the property but, rather, both probably rented it out to unknown tenants. Nicols, who was white, was a schoolteacher (USDI 1850a:90b) and occupied the property sometime before 1842 as a garden (Talbot County Court 1841–1842:352). Henry Corkran bought the lot in 1866 and sold it to Robert Walker two years later, who then sold the portion of it in question to Catherine Murray in 1888. With Murray’s ownership, the site returned to African-American hands (Schmidt 2016:27). Corkran does not appear in the Easton census for 1870 and may not have lived at the site at all—or, if so, only briefly. Walker was a grocer (USDI 1870:23) and may have lived on the site. The ceramics from the immediate context of the toy tea saucer—pearlware, whiteware, yellowware, and ironstone—suggest a date of deposition in the 1830s or 1840s and the artifacts within the occupation surface accumulated gradually within this time frame. Therefore, the toy may have been most closely associated with either Alexander Bullitt’s tenants or Thomas Nicols’ family. The match with the ca. 1890 set throws this date off completely, however. If that date is good, then Catherine Murray’s household was most likely to have owned the tea set from which this saucer came. This would firmly establish the site’s occupation by African Americans during the deposition of the toy saucer.

The location of one of the remaining two partial toy teacups (Figure 2.5.D) in a shovel test pit, which lacks stratigraphic integrity, negates attempts to pin down that artifact’s owners. The other, datable toy teacup from the Freeman site (Figure 2.5.C) came from the portion of the Freeman site that is now on the border between 108 and 110 Talbot Lane. 110 Talbot Lane shares 108’s chain of title until 1888, when Robert Walker split the property. He sold the



A

B

C

D

**FIGURE 2.5:** Pieces of toy tea sets from The Hill. A. Teacup from Bethel A.M.E. Church site. B. Tea Saucer from Freeman site. C. Fragment of teacup base and body from Freeman site. D. Fragments of teacup rim and body from Freeman site. All pieces come from domestic contexts dated mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century to early-20<sup>th</sup>-century.

southern portion, now 110 Talbot Lane, to George Tilghman in 1888, thus returning ownership of this section of the original Freeman property also to African-American hands (Schmidt 2016:28). Because this fragment of toy teacup came from a fill layer, the date of the context's artifacts cannot be pinned down as clearly. The layer contains mainly artifacts dating from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth but appears that it may have been deposited in the middle of the twentieth century when the house at 108 Talbot Lane was demolished. This toy teacup may therefore have been owned by the Nicols or Walker families, who were both white, or by either the Murray or Tilghman families, who were both African-American.

It is not clear that these artifacts were owned by African-American families. In all honesty, the Nicols and Walker families are more likely candidates for the artifacts from the Freeman site. However, there is enough room in the chain of title to follow along a line of inquiry into what such artifacts might have meant for African-American families in nineteenth-century Easton. I therefore offer the following as a possible interpretation of these items.

All of these pieces from toy tea sets post-date the advent, in the 1840s, of a middle class and a middle-class material culture in the United States and reflect the character of this culture. Diana Wall's (1991) seminal analysis of ceramics in mid-nineteenth-century New York links plainly decorated, gothic-style tablewares with the cult of domesticity and the belief that dinners were sacred, collective, family events that should stand in contrast to the competitive individualistic nature of the outside world. This ideology was common among white middle-class Americans from the middle to late nineteenth century. Wall describes a divide in teawares between those that were plain and Gothic, like the tablewares dominant in middle-class households of the period, and which were used to serve tea at mealtimes and therefore were stylistically in keeping with the sacred associations of the meal; and those that were highly

decorated and were used during social teas in parlors where people, especially women, actively displayed their wealth, taste, and social position. Even where middle-class households possessed only plain, paneled, Gothic teawares, Wall suggests that they may have viewed afternoon social teas as extensions of the family and invited only those with whom they shared the closest bonds. In these cases, plain wares would, once again, “have served to elicit the almost sacred values of community and mutual help—values which could be very useful for those at the lower end of the middle-class spectrum? among the women who were gathering together for tea.” (Wall 1991:79). Plain, white, Gothic-style teawares in white middle-class households of this period therefore signified the sacredness of community and family.

All of the toy tea set components excavated on The Hill reflect these sacred associations in their design. Together, the five pieces represent four distinct vessels. All four vessels were made of porcelain, although the body and glaze on three of the vessels (Figure 2.5.A, B, and C) are rough and imperfect. The bodies of the two complete vessels have undulations in them and the complete cup has large cavities in the body and glaze. The partial base has some discoloring of the glaze during firing. Therefore, these are not fine examples of porcelain. However, they are sturdy. All four vessels have a plain, clear glaze on white-colored bodies. The only decoration in them is molded faceting on the incomplete cup rim (Figure 2.5.D). The complete cup (Figure 2.5.A) is slightly fluted and there may be a faint effort at faceting in its construction. The saucer (Figure 2.5.B) and partial cup base (Figure 2.5.C) are smooth and round. Altogether, these four vessels resemble the plain, white simplicity and cleanness of the cult of domesticity. The faceted molding on one and possibly two of the vessels reflects the Gothic style. If we are to understand that, on such small objects, faceted molding would have been more difficult, then it is possible to describe the toy tea sets of these two archaeological sites as resembling the Gothic

style if they are not all perfect examples of it. These design traits suggest that some African-American families on The Hill endorsed the sanctity of community and family at the core of the cult of domesticity, a value they shared with the American white middle class. This shared material culture correlates with nineteenth-century middle-class African America's sharing of the gendered spheres ideology in their written discourses (Ball 2012).

For working-class free African-American families for whom the separate spheres ideology did not ring true, such toys may have instead been a way to introduce middle-class ideals of domestic sanctity to their young daughters to prepare them for careers of domestic service. In this line of work, they would be expected to aid in carrying out those ideals on an everyday basis through such duties as cooking, cleaning, and serving tea. In the nineteenth century, most free women of color throughout the Northern, free states found work mainly as domestic servants in the houses of wealthier white families. In fact, many could find little other work. In 1832, African-American speaker and activist Maria Stewart, who has worked as a domestic servant, despaired at the limited opportunities available to women like her. In a lecture she delivered at the Franklin Hall in Boston, Stewart describes the drudgery of menial, servile labor as a slavery of the mind that was worse than slavery of the body—this kind of work dulls the mind, whereas true freedom includes the ability to think for oneself and to cultivate talents (Stewart 1995 [1832]a:6). Despite their aspirations to apply themselves to more creative and engaging work, African-American women continued to take what jobs in domestic service were available to them.

In Easton, African-American women provided the backbone of the domestic service industry. In 1870, domestic service was almost entirely an African-American female industry in

Easton.<sup>27</sup> The 1870 census for Easton (UDSI 1870) listed 302 black and mulatto females as “domestics,” along with 25 black and mulatto men. Only 24 white females (less than half a percent of that population) followed this line of work. Both women and older girls worked in domestic service and the industry accounted for 78% of the adult African-American female population in Easton at the time. More African-American girls below the age of 20 (33%, the plurality) were engaged in domestic service than attended school (21%). Although girls of color below age 10 were more likely to be in school or at home, domestic service overtook these other two leading occupations by age 13. The youngest African-American domestic servant in 1870 was Mary Laws at 7 years old. African-American women in Easton thus entered domestic service early and tended to remain in it throughout their lives. Playing with tea sets would have familiarized these young girls with the making and serving of tea, as well as the cultural meanings attached to the teawares themselves. They would have carried this knowledge with them when they went to work in other people’s homes.

Some free African Americans adhered to these patterns of consumer taste common among the white middle-class. Kathryn Deeley (2015) has explored these divergences within the free African-American community in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Annapolis as evidence of diversity within the community. The Easton contexts in which these toy tea set components were found display similar diversity of consumption patterns. The context for the toy saucer (Figure 2.5.B), which was recovered in a mid-nineteenth-century occupation layer, demonstrates a more working-class ceramics assemblage. From the immediate archaeological context (unit and stratum) of the saucer, 13 ceramic sherds represent six or more vessels. Only two vessels are plain and whitish: an ironstone plate and a late pearlware mug or pitcher. The

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<sup>27</sup> This is the first year in which the census provides a complete record of individuals’ occupations. Occupation entries had been restricted mainly to heads of household in the previous two decades of individualized enumeration.

other vessels are quite a colorful array: one or two blue transfer-printed whiteware plates or saucers and other, unidentified vessels of annular-banded yellowware, cable-decorated pearlware, and refined redware. These ceramics compose a mis-matched set that suggests a piecemeal approach to consumption. The presence of ironstone sets the date of deposition in the 1840s or later, but much of the pottery in this immediate context is earlier. The residents may therefore have purchased older ceramics in order to save on cost. Although the ironstone present is plainly decorated, the household's ceramics consumption as a whole does not appear to match the middle-class patterns emerging in the middle part of the nineteenth century.

One of the other toy teacups from the Freeman site (Figure 2.5.D) was recovered in a shovel test pit and ceramics analysis is not relevant to its interpretation here. However, the other teacup (Figure 2.5.C) came from mid-twentieth-century fill bearing the remnants of mid-nineteenth-century-to-early-twentieth-century domestic activities at the site. This ceramics assemblage greatly reflected middle-class domesticity. 45 sherds represent 20 or more vessels. Two or more of these vessels were of plain ironstone: a hollow form and a flat form vessel of unidentified type, together accounting for 15 sherds. There were also some coarser wares: one annular-banded yellowware storage jar, two vessels of coarse earthenware with no sign of glazing, and one large blue and gray American stoneware storage jar. There were several refined earthenware and porcelain vessels of various decoration. These included one blue sponge-decorated whiteware bowl or cup, one blue handpainted shell-edged whiteware plate, one green handpainted whiteware flat form vessel, one blue handpainted scalloped-edge whiteware plate or saucer, four transfer-printed whiteware flat form vessels of various motifs, and one creamware saucer. There were three porcelain vessels: one handpainted pink teaware piece, a plain white saucer, and one undecorated vessel of unknown type with a splash of black on its underside. If

the storage vessels are eliminated from consideration, the collection of vessels mostly resembles the common division between plainly-decorated tablewares and highly-decorated teawares that Wall found in New York. The teawares are fairly mis-matched, although the uniform palate of the four transfer-printed blue whiteware vessels, all of which were flat form of a common narrow thickness and may have been tea saucers, may represent some effort toward the appearance of standardization. This household's ceramics consumption appears to resemble patterns that emerged among the white middle class in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The archaeological context for the toy teacup from the Bethel Church site (Figure 2.5.A) also resembles middle-class consumption patterns. Here, 14 sherds represent nine or more vessels. Most of the colorful vessels here are utilitarian: one gray English or American stoneware vessel, one or two coarse earthenware bowls with dark brown lead glaze, and one hollow form stoneware bowl or storage jar with Albany slip on its interior. There are also two items of Rockingham tableware and a single small creamware sherd and one of whiteware. The other two vessels are both plain ironstone: a platter and a plate. This assemblage reflects strongly the middle-class aesthetic. Aside from the Rockingham, ironstone dominates the tablewares.

It is interesting that the ceramics assemblages of these several households diverge substantially, while the ware types and decorations of the toy teawares remain fairly uniform. Families in Easton's African-American community in the nineteenth century managed to accrue different levels of wealth. Some owned their own homes while others rented. Their incomes also varied. Within their homes, some families espoused middle-class ideals of domesticity through their material culture while others did not. However, they approached the raising of their children with a common purpose and method, as displayed through the material culture they



supplied to their children. All young girls in Easton would have been familiar with middle-class domestic gender norms and ideals regardless of how their own families lived.

Whether preparing their daughters for domestic service or living out their own reinterpretation of the cult of domesticity in their own homes, African-American families enculturated their daughters into values of the sacredness of community through their tea sets. This practice resulted not only in the common style of their toy tea wares but also in the spatial distributions of these toys.

Children, specifically, girls, often played with their tea sets at home. Most of the accounts and depictions of girls and children playing with toy tea sets in the following section feature them playing

alone, with dolls, or with friends or family members in their own homes. However, children also carried their toys to their playmates' homes. The intact toy teacup and tea saucer (Figures 2.5.A and 2.5.B) fit together perfectly. They are also made of the same crude porcelain with irregular plain white glaze. Although the cup-to-saucer size ratio is smaller than in functional tea sets used by adults, the size ratios are comparable to those in at least some other toy tea sets from the period (McKendry N.d.b). These two pieces, from two different sites on adjacent blocks, were



**FIGURE 2.6:** Matching toy teacup from a house site at Bethel A.M.E. Church. These are items A and B from Figure 2.5. Church and toy saucer from the Freeman site. The perfect match suggests either children carried tea sets with them to one another's houses or that neighbors bought their children identical sets.

either parts of the same tea set or items from separate but identical tea sets purchased by neighbors. In the latter case, this match reinforces the common approach that parents took to raising their daughters. In the former case, it suggests that playing at tea-making and tea-serving was a communal activity in which children shared what assets they had—their toys—with one another. This sort of activity is very much different from the typical tea service among adults, in which hosts were expected to provide both tea and teawares. Even if they did not carry teawares with them on social visits as they grew older, this kind of collective playing among girls would have strengthened collective bonds and laid the groundwork for mutual assistance later in life. These community relationships became the foundation for the networks of information, exchange of services, and general support that characterized motherwork among African-American women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century communities like that centered on The Hill. As they grew older, these girls exchanged taking their toys to one another's houses for taking turns caring for one another's children, sharing information on pregnancy and maternity, and in other ways sharing the load of the work that was raising the next generation of the community.

#### *Literary relationships between girls and tea*

To deepen the understanding of nineteenth-century African-American girls' relationships with tea, I turn again to the written record of African-American newspapers from the period. As with marbles, tea made appearances that aimed to convey messages on morality. However, writers addressing female audiences focused their attention on more domestic relationships in ways that reflect the gender role expectations of nineteenth-century middle-class domesticity.

I searched for “tea” And “toy and then for “tea” And “girl.” The first search returned 91 results. The latter search returned 359 results, including some overlap with the former. A great many stories were returned, many of them written for children, but in most cases tea appeared only as a temporal marker of teatime to mark the chronological progression of the tale. In these cases, the authors attach no particular significance to the meaning of tea or teawares. For example, in “Hetty’s Tongue,” (*Christian Recorder* 1865), the main character gets herself into trouble for gossiping idly of news she only half-heard while taking up the tea in the course of her work as a domestic servant. The message of the story relates to the fault of gossiping and tea service was not essential to the plot except as one of any number of potential settings in which the character could have overheard part of a conversation between her employer and another woman. Only 17 articles directly describe relationships between children and tea, both in terms of toy tea sets and actually making tea. Fictional stories, essays, and short notes about children and tea convey themes of playfulness, creativity, the importance of sharing, kindness, and education, and the necessity of taking on responsibility in the household.

### *Tea sets*

Children’s toy tea sets themselves appeared occasionally in the pages of nineteenth-century African-American newspapers, typically as goods for sale. In preparation for a fundraising sale in (1850), the ladies of the Antislavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati, Ohio, advertised in the *National Era* requesting submissions of sewing and knitting goods, farm produce, and whatever manner of goods anyone could spare:

Let the saddler send us some carpet-bags, or small trunks; the tailor, a handsome vest or two; the shoe-dealer, children's little shoes, or gent's slippers; the merchant, silk neck

handkerchiefs, or a pound of sewing silk; the stationer, books or stationary; the china dealer, children's tea-sets, or something in their line; the cooper, tubs and buckets...[etc.]—so that all may give of their abundance a little, and by the blessing of God it shall come back to them after many days.

The society also requested that supporters of the antislavery cause hold off on buying winter clothes or Christmas gifts or other things until they've looked at what the fundraiser has on sale; and for city people to buy their produce from them instead of at the regular market (Antislavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati 1850). On December 13, 1880, a John Wanamaker of Philadelphia listed in the *Christian Recorder* a very long list of items for sale, probably with the notion that these “Gifts of Use and Beauty” might make some fine Christmas presents. Amid the 338 items of clothing, accoutrements, stationary, crockery, and fabric, there were 194 toys for children. The first three items in the list of toys were tea sets: plain, gilt banded, and decorated. There are also a large number of dolls and clothes for them (Wanamaker 1880). In 1887, the *Recorder* launched a subscription campaign very similar to those done today by public broadcasting stations, asking for people to sign up as subscribers and offering gifts as incentives. For the subscription fee of \$2, the editors offered not only 13 months of the publication but also a free book from a list they included here. And they added extra incentives for multiple subscriptions: “For two subscribers, with cash, \$4.00, books: Ben Hur, Bond and Free, Black and White, Historical Sketch of the A.M.E. Church [presumably longer and better books than those in the single-subscription list], a Bisque Doll or a Toy Tea Set.” The incentives went on and up from there (*Christian Recorder* 1887). Like Wanamaker’s advertisement, this fundraiser ran in early December in time for readers to use the donation rewards as gifts for their children. These advertisements do not provide much insight into the relationships between children, especially girls, and tea other than to show its pervasiveness in middle-class African-American culture.

Actual depictions of playing and preparing real tea convey more cultural meaning than lists of products and their prices.

*Who was involved?*

Playing with toy tea sets and preparing and serving actual tea appeared in nine stories aimed specifically at children, two other fictional stories, and three essays on morality. Whereas marbles had a predominantly male association but some flexibility in this regard, tea and toy tea sets were made fairly exclusively for girls. Seven articles described children playing at tea with toy tea sets. In four of them, a single girl was depicted in this activity; two stories depicted multiple girls playing together with the sets; and one referred to children generally. The case was the same in articles involving actual preparation of tea. Four depicted or referred to girls doing this on their own; one referred to tea-making in a discussion of qualities for men to look for in young women to marry; one story depicted an adult woman having tea parties with her “young friends,” though the exact definition of “young” in this case was not defined (Harper 1889); and one article referred to children generally. Because of the strong feminine associations with tea-making, either for play or for real, the two references to children may very likely also have meant girls even without saying so directly. Depictions of tea in these 14 stories and essays therefore provides insight into the messages that nineteenth-century middle-class African-American families directed toward their daughters.

### *Moral lessons*

Like marbles, toy tea sets often appeared in stories for children that imparted moral lessons about the proper way for children to treat one another. They stressed messages about sisterliness, friendliness, respect, sharing, and creative playfulness. In “Bessie’s Moss Picture” (McConaughy 1865), A group of young girls gather mosses in the forest to make a miniature landscape in a box and bring it to a girl who is always sick and can't go out to play. The girls work together, supplying Bessie with things from which she makes a picture out of the little forest things: pebbles for boulders, little plants for trees, painting as it were with the bits of forest things in her diorama. Playing at tea makes a brief appearance in the beginning when one of the girls gathering things for Bessie says, “One would think the fairies drank out of these tiny crimson cups,” describing moss flowers. The story praises the girls for their kindness to Bessie and also lauds the houseridden girl’s creativity and all the girls’ ability to appreciate the small pleasures in life.

The relationships in these stories are not always so perfect, however. “The China Doll’s Story” (*Christian Recorder* 1864c) contrasts right behavior in one of its young female characters with wrong behavior in the other. A rich girl has many dolls with which she plays and has tea parties. A poor girl visits and the rich girl, out of generosity, offers to give her any doll she has except her favorite one. The poor girl steals the favorite doll anyway, is discovered, and whipped. The knowledge of this punishment ruins the enjoyment of playing with the favorite doll for the rich girl and she takes pity on the poor girl, despite her thievery. So she gives away the doll to the poor girl. At the rich girl's kindness, the poor girl becomes very ashamed and quite reformed from then on. Although the author describes corporal punishment as utterly

normal, it is the positive benevolence of the one girl to the other that finally turns the latter's character arc toward good behavior. Therefore, this story aims to influence girls' treatment of one another mostly through offering a positive role model—who models kindness, generosity, empathy, and forgiveness—although the threat of punishment does linger in the background.

The author of “The New Year's Purse” (*Christian Recorder* 1866) takes a more confrontational approach. In this story, a girl takes up the ambition to knit her mother a purse as a New Year's gift. Her younger sister attempts to help but repeatedly delays the finishing of the gift. The older sister loses her patience and her temper with the other and the moral of the story revolves around the reprimand she receives for her behavior. After the older daughter has learned her lesson, the parents gift both girls with a toy tea set. Here, the model is a negative one that is critiqued.

In 1888, the *Christian Recorder* printed a short humorous story (*Christian Recorder* 1888b) about why one should eat what is offered, involving a girl playing at a tea party and a picky gentleman who kept rejecting what she offered him until, fed up, she told him to eat what he was given. Although they take different approaches, these three stories provided lessons in selflessness, kindness, and generosity, as well as contentment for their young audience to mirror.

Fictional stories also hinted to adults the right way to treat children. In the first part of a story called “The Legal Measure” (Linn 1855), a man who is jealous of his brother's having a fine young daughter entreats the girl to come live with him. The girl rejects her uncle's repeated invitations, reasoning that, while she loves her uncle, she loves her parents more. Moreover, she dislikes her aunt because her aunt is selfish and doesn't have much affection for children and displayed this in refusing to let the girl play with her tea set in the parlor while visiting. In addition to the broader theme of jealousy, Linn speaks through her young female character about

the importance of letting children play rather than worrying about propriety or one's furniture. Where fictional tales usually speak to younger audiences, the retort of the girl here serves to flip the lesson around.

In "Madge's Bank," the author, a "Cousin Mary" (1862) also inverts the typical positive association of tea with play and childhood in order to impart to both parents and to children the importance of education as a compliment to other childhood pursuits. In this story, a girl plants her penny in the ground in the side of a riverbank in the mistaken belief that it will grow and multiply as in a financial bank, so that she can buy her mother a gift for her birthday. It doesn't, obviously, and her father buys the gift instead. The moral is the importance of education and an understanding of things (for girls as well as boys). In establishing the setting of the story as an idyllic child's space, the author describes the bushes as having been "cleared below for doll's picnics and invitation tea-drinkings." The effect here of the setting description is to emphasize play. Given the overall message of proper education, the author, a "Cousin Mary," presents this idyllic play-centered space as a mistake, a fallacy. Cousin Mary quite clearly identifies playing at tea parties as a mark of childhood and it helps to convey the creativity in the main character that leads her to a...creative...interpretation of her father's explanation of "banks." While this creativity is not necessarily negative, it is incomplete in providing the child with the skills she needs.

Generally, however, nineteenth-century authors endorsed childlike playfulness where age-appropriate. In reply to the rhetorical question, "will you sell your table," the author of an essay entitled "Selling Old Things" (*Christian Recorder* 1863) describes all the rich and wonderful family memories that are attached to his simple pine table, memories that make it worth far more to the author than the finest table one could offer in trade. He holds especially



fondle the memories of the family's children playing in all manner of ways with the table, including playing with their toy tea sets underneath of it. The author makes similar comments about his watch and tea kettle:

Like the table and the watch, the kettle has been adding dividends to its capital every day since its first purchase, and, though nothing but iron, it could not be bought for its weight in silver...It is never a good fortune that sells such old friends out of the family, and takes in new ones that have no history and no tongue.

Whether discussing proper treatment of other people or of things, writers of children's stories and essays in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers used toy tea sets as markers of childhood and props for conveying moral messages about the proper relationships among children and between adults and children.

The actual tea service itself appears frequently as a symbol of adulthood, even when children were involved as participants, with typical connotations of a good home well-kept, of domestic comfort and homeliness. Sometimes, the stories simply depict tea as a social activity common among adults. In "A Victory," author Jeaneth Holme (1872) writes about a family that leaves their eldest daughter in charge of her two younger siblings while the parents go out to tea. The older girl has particular difficulty in getting her younger brother into bed and Holme praises the girl's ability to restrain herself from losing her temper with her brother. In "Trial and Triumph" (*Christian Recorder* 1888c; Harper 1889), one of F.E.W. Harper's characters, a Mrs. Larkins, who is rather well off, hosts tea parties "to her young friends." In both of these cases, tea-drinking becomes part of the scenery. Although these stories embed messages for their readers, particularly moral lessons for youth, getting together to drink tea is circumstantial to the plot and therefore appears simply as part of typical adult behavior. In other cases, however, tea plays a more integral role to the message.

Whereas playing at tea parties symbolized childhood playfulness, creativity, and innocence, actually preparing tea was serious business and represented taking on responsibility in the household. On September 13, 1862, the *Christian Recorder* (1862e) printed an essay on advice to young women on proper behavior, which also served to advise young men on what to look for in a partner. It praised girls who are kind and good-natured over those who are pretty. She may not be the most fashionable or elegant or refined, but a nice girl looks to the duties of the home: “Who rises betimes, and superintends the morning meal? Who makes the toast, and the tea, and buttons the boy's shirts, and waters the flowers, and feeds the chickens, and brightens up the parlor and sittingroom? Is it the languisher, or the giraffe, or the elegante? Not a bit of it; it's the nice girl.” The paper’s editors therefore stressed responsibility and capability in household duties. The paper also warned against the misfortunes that might befall a young woman should she fail to apply herself toward mastering domestic skills and behave responsibly in her duties.

Similarly, in “Lizzy’s First Experiment at Housekeeping” (Irving 1852b), the title character, an older girl, attempts to keep house while her mother is away and does a rather bad job of it because she had never worked very studiously at it when her mother was around to teach her. She finally manages to do alright with some help from her friend and her friend's mother. Again as a marker of adulthood, tea remains in the background here as a part of the scenes in the house and for marking the chronology. It also makes a brief appearance among the litany of household duties that Lizzy is very bad at. One day, instead of minding the house Lizzy goes berry-picking with her friend and the house burns down, her young sister only being saved because she ran out of the house on her own. Thankfully, the tale concludes, she's now since grown into a fine housekeeper for her own family. This parable, especially the extremely close

call with death on account of the main character's laziness and incompetence, aimed to frighten young girls into applying themselves ardently to preparing for the day they would run their own households.

Some children took on these roles earlier in life, particularly when single parents took ill. On such occasions, daughters could be expected to step up and take on the duty of nursing their parent back to health. In "Jessie's Victory," the author (McConaughy 1864) praises her title character, a young girl, for staying home from a school picnic in order to care for her sick mother—part of which involves preparing tea for her mother to drink. Jessie's self-denial comes back to her in full measure when her classmates and teacher put together a basket of food for her impoverished family. In "The Little Cross Bearers," (P. 1861), a little girl stays home while her sister and their friends go spend a lovely day in the woods because she feels she has to care for her sick mother and her infant and toddler brothers. Again, part of nursing her mother includes preparing a cup of tea. The narrator praises the girl for her self-sacrifice and she winds up being even happier through sacrifice and service than her sister was enjoying a day in the woods. These stories encouraged young girls to learn the lessons of sacrifice from an early age and to see themselves as parts of larger family units to which they had certain obligations. Even in less dire circumstances, writers in the pages of these papers encouraged children to take on some responsibilities where they were able. An unsigned essay on morality in the *Christian Recorder* (1893) gives praise and guidance for children who go into the kitchen to make tea while their parents host guests. This, the author contends, is the mark of "a well ordered home." Thus, when it came to preparing tea for actual consumption, rather than in play, the overwhelming message that young girls received as they grew up was that they should make themselves useful and support their households.

*Authorship: race and gender*

The authorship of pieces on children and tea in nineteenth-century African-American newspapers mirrors that of pieces on marbles. African-American editors borrowed frequently from white-authored pieces in white-run publications but African Americans also contributed their own essays, notes, and stories. The two signed advertisements for toy tea sets come from the Ladies' Antislavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati (Antislavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati 1850) and a John Wanamaker of Philadelphia (Wanamaker 1880). The sewing circle in Cincinnati was organized by Sarah Otis Ernst, an antislavery radical who sought to push her local moderate abolitionists waiting for political change toward more active approaches. Although she collaborated with some of the leading African-American speakers for her antislavery conventions, which started in 1850 and quickly became influential gatherings for abolitionists of various stripes, black and white Cincinnati abolitionists tended to work in separate groups and Ernst's sewing circle itself was white (Robertson 2010:95–105). The best candidates in the census for Wanamaker—a 43-year-old clothing manufacturer or merchant in 1880 (USDI 1880:4) and a 61-year-old merchant in 1900 (USDI 1900b:10B)—were both white. The *Christian Recorder's* editors wrote the remaining advertisement. This set of authors thus included a white man and woman and African-American men.

Among the stories for children, authorship was mixed. "A Legal Measure" was penned by a Lizzie Lynn. A "Cousin Mary" wrote "Madge's Bank." "The China Doll's Story" ran unsigned in the *Christian Recorder*. The full identities of any of these writers is unknown. As with marbles, African-American editors also republished several pieces from white publications. The *Recorder's* editors republished "Selling Old Things" from the *Century* and "The New

Year's Purse" from the *Methodist*. Based on the use of shillings as a currency in this latter story, the author was most likely British. A Mrs. N. McConaughy wrote "Bessie's Moss Picture" for the *Ladies' Repository* and "Jessie's Victory" for *Merry's Museum*, both white-run publications (USDS 1840c:236; *Ladies' Repository* 1841:i; Pflieger 2016). "Somewhat Mixed" originally appeared in the Kingston, NY, *Freeman*, a local paper from the Hudson Valley. The author of "Little Cross Bearers" signed their initials M.L.P. and the *Recorder* reprinted this piece from Boston's *Congregationalist* (Library of Congress N.d.b). Most of these authors are hard to identify, even when their names are printed.

Among the only identifiable authors, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote the serial "Trial and Triumph" for the *Christian Recorder*. Harper was an African-American abolitionist and suffragist born free in Baltimore in 1825. She published several books of poetry, toured as a lecturer for abolition, community development and political equality during Reconstruction, and universal suffrage (Leeman 1996). She was already quite well-known publically when she wrote "Trial and Triumph," which may have aided the serial's popularity. Harper's "Trial and Triumph" was one of the longer stories to appear in these printed pages and marked an unusual departure from the *Recorder's* usual short stories. The paper's editors noted proudly the level of interest they received from readers writing in about Harper's piece (*Christian Recorder* 1889c)! Mary Irving wrote "Lizzy's First Experiment in Housekeeping" and Jeaneth Holme wrote "A Victory." Both Irving and Holme are likely to have been African-American members of the A.M.E. Church because they wrote what appear to be original pieces for the *Christian Recorder*. Thus, although the editors of these papers published more works on children and tea by white authors, African-American women made significant contributions of their own. As with stories about marbles, both black and white women—and some men—as writers played collective roles

in helping to raise African-American children—though most white writers did so through the selections of African-American editors and probably without much knowledge of where their stories ultimately ended up.

These depictions and discussions of girls playing with tea sets and making tea prepared young girls for domestic roles inside and outside the home. Many of the stories convey morals about the proper conduct of interpersonal relationships: how young girls should treat one another and their family members and how adults should treat young girls. Emphasizing virtues of kindness and sharing and working for the benefit of others instilled in young girls the values at the core of middle-class domesticity, values by which the home might be made a safe and comfortable place insulated from the harshness and individualistic competition of the outside world. These values would have resonated with middle-class African Americans whose family discourses were built around a particularly African-American interpretation of domesticity that incorporated antislavery politics. In terms of work, the stories here focus mainly on domestic duties inside the home. But the reality was that most free African-American girls in Easton in the nineteenth century would find themselves saddled with domestic work for others in addition to the responsibilities they had to their own families. Work took most African-American women out of their homes, which negated the divide between inner, feminine domesticity and outer, masculine engagement with the world that formed the essential binary underpinning the cult of domesticity, and the breakdown of the ideology on this practical level is reflected in the variation within ceramic assemblages of Easton's homes. While the lives of working-class African Americans in did not replicate either white or black versions of middle-class domesticity, those families familiarized their daughters with its value system through both the material and written culture of tea. For African-American women, domesticity did not stop at the front door. It

extended into the houses of the people they worked for and into the African-American community as a whole, where domestic responsibilities, sharing burdens, and taking responsibility for motherwork tied households together.

Much of the messaging aimed at boys, as illustrated by the newspaper content on marbles, focused on self-improvement. It was inward-looking and individualistic in contrast to the messaging toward girls that focused more on outward social behavior and personal relationships. Boys learned about risk and reward (playing for keeps), personal skill, and economic responsibility (not gambling or at least restraining it). Girls learned about sharing, kindness, domesticity, and pulling their weight in the household. This distinction is consistent with the separate gendered spheres ideology of the cult of domesticity common among American middle classes from the 1840s into the early twentieth century. However, it is also consistent with the sorts of gender roles that African-American leaders and writers advocated for adults in their communities and the ways in which African Americans tailored the cult of domesticity to their needs. The domestic sphere in Easton's African-American community never stopped at the household level, but embraced the entire community. It had to. African-American women in the town almost all worked outside of their homes and shared the duties of caring for and raising children. Boys and young men in the nineteenth century often could not retreat to the comforts of their own immediate families and homes because they were bound out as apprentices or working outside of Easton. Despite these difficulties, working together as communities enabled families to help one another with childcare, reading to children, and sustaining the community as a whole from one generation to the next.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Making a Spiritual Home**

The two historic African-American church congregations on The Hill, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Asbury United Methodist Church (formerly Methodist Episcopal), have anchored Easton's African-American community since they were organized in the antebellum period. Archaeological excavations at both sites provide some glimpses into the relationship churches had with other aspects of cultural life and with the internal social structure for the African-American community in this town, particularly the churches' strong support for education and the diversity of religious practice among the community's members. The interpretation of archaeological findings from these two churches thus enables us to see where cultural life converged around collective goals and where it diverged.

Enslaved Africans carried with them across the Atlantic a great many spiritual and religious traditions, from Bantu ancestor veneration (Creel 1989:54–55; Samford 1999) to Ivory Coast secret societies of Poro and Sande (Creel 1989:280–299) and a variety of practices to guard against and control spiritual forces (Fennell 2007; Brown 2004). On North American plantations, they preserved and reinterpreted elements of these traditions within other Christian frameworks to develop African-American religious traditions practiced in plantation praise houses and in churches established by free people of color. On Maryland's Eastern Shore, the Methodist Episcopal Church and its offshoots particularly held sway from the American Revolution onward (Harrison 1915:1–5). The forms of Methodism African Americans practiced within the Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal denominations, as well as other branches of Methodism, together make up African Methodism.



In both slavery and in freedom, African Americans sought in religion a spirituality that supported them in the freedom struggle. For free African Americans before and after the Civil War, the church was the center of spiritual life, of networking, of mutual financial support, of political leadership, and of underground railroad activity, all united through a black liberation theology that encouraged righteous rebellion against slavery and racism (Wayman 1881; Payne 1891; Cone 1970; Newman et al. 2001; Newman 2008; LaRoche 2014).<sup>28</sup> These same activities and themes persisted through the Civil War into the present. Black churches have therefore played a central role in organizing individual communities and in creating a broader sense of community among free African Americans in exchange of ideas and in shared practices.

In Talbot County, white Quakers and Methodists played a central role in the wave of manumissions that accompanied the Northern First Emancipation of the latter eighteenth century that led to the county's large free African-American population by the Federal period (Dorsey 2011:18). Both denominations came to an understanding of the immorality of holding others in bondage and many manumitted the enslaved Africans under their control. Third Haven Meeting of the Society of Friends in Easton has since maintained an ongoing relationship with the

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<sup>28</sup> The black church has sometimes been criticized as encouraging complacency and patient moral superiority (Coates 2015:28–29,90–91) but, in the nineteenth century, African-American religion was an active force for justice and liberty. Activist and speaker Maria Stewart, who gave several speeches in Boston in 1832 and 1833 (Logan 1995:1–2), urged her fellow African Americans to work together to lift up the whole race, including women and girls, a charge she felt God had given her to deliver to her community (Stewart 1995 [1832]a:6) Even when the black men of her community turned on her for raising her voice, she held firm in her faith in her cause: “the frowns of the world shall never discourage me; for with the help of God, I am resolved to withstand the fiery darts of the devil, and the assaults of wicked men” (Stewart 1995 [1832]b:11). David Walker (1830b:51) called his “colored” brethren to rise up in righteousness, warning whites that “When God Almighty commences his battle on the continent of America, for the oppression of his people, tyrants will wish they never were born.” Faith in the righteousness of rebellion guided the hand of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. Black ministers of several congregations but particularly Methodists worked along what became known as the Underground Railroad (LaRoche 2014). It is therefore no surprise that the circuit riders of the A.M.E. Church coming and going from Easton in the antebellum period found themselves often beset by white mobs or arrested (Wayman 1881:3–11). The black minister and the black congregation became symbols of freedom and of threat to the presiding social order of racial hierarchy. The independent black congregation too was both a symbol and a mechanism for self-determination out from under the control of the white ministry.

families of free people that the Quakers freed, beginning in the 1790s when the meeting dispatched two of its members to inquire into the wellbeing of the recently liberated families (Needles 1876:34). A Quaker named Cochran sold to Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1820 the lot on Hanson Street that became the church's home (Fritz and Ludlow 1976b). This relationship continued up through the twentieth century, when the meetinghouse served as a safe zone for black schoolchildren facing harassment during the integration of schools in the 1950s and '60s (Eric Dashiell, oral history interview with the author October 23, 2013). In recent years, Third Haven member Priscilla Morris has supported the documentation and preservation of African-American history on The Hill through her own research and as treasurer of Historic Easton, Inc. Despite these consistent ties since Quakers first moved en masse (though not unanimously) toward abolition, the early Friends did not admit African Americans to join the meeting. Antislavery sentiment and action among Easton's Quakers in the late eighteenth century were therefore fraught between benevolent interest in the wellbeing of enslaved Africans and a selfish interest in Quakers' own moral integrity. At least some Friends freed their slaves more to free their own consciences and safeguard their own righteousness and entry to heaven than out of a true interest in equality. Latter-eighteenth-century economic shifts in grain agriculture on the Eastern Shore also made the manumission of at least some slaves and the hiring of temporary free black labor financially convenient for some landowners, in a form of what critical race theorist Derrick Bell calls "interest convergence" (Bell 1995 [1979]:20–28; Dorsey 2011:14–19). The Quaker relationship with abolition was therefore a complicated one and the growing free African-American population gravitated instead toward Methodism.

Methodism began as a lay movement within the Church of England and came to the American colonies in the 1730s through the ministries and evangelism of John and Charles

Wesley and George Whitefield. The movement took hold in Easton and throughout the Eastern Shore during the era of the American Revolution when Methodist ministers traveled the region preaching. The war and its politics drove many ministers of the established Church of England from their posts. Being a movement within the established church and many Methodist ministers being English by birth, many of the itinerant Methodist preachers found their loyalty to the patriot cause in question. Several were arrested between 1777 and 1782 for continuing to preach without taking an oath of allegiance to Maryland as stipulated in the 1777 “Act for the better security of the government”—in 1782, a new law gave special leniency to the Methodists (Harrison 1915:113–114). Undeterred by his arrest in 1779 under this charge, and refusing to take the oath of allegiance to Maryland after having already taken a similar one to Delaware, Methodist minister Joseph Hartley spent three months in the Easton jail for preaching contrary to the law (Harrison 1915:114,305).

Despite his imprisonment, Hartley continued to preach through the prison bars to people who assembled outside to hear him (Harrison 1915:1–5). “By the time of his release in October he had raised up a society of followers which formed the nucleus of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Easton” (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1929). After the American Revolution, Bishop Francis Asbury organized an independent American denomination called the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church and the residents in Easton and Talbot County who had joined the movement became part of this new denomination.

The Methodist movement attracted and welcomed people of all walks of life, especially poor white and both free and enslaved black people, in ways that the established Anglican Church did not. As Methodist minister and historian Gary Moore puts it, “They were not the Episcopalians serving the wealthy and they were not the Presbyterians looking for the elect”

(personal interview with the author December 4, 2019). According to Methodist theology, salvation is open to all who embrace God. Riotous camp meetings, congregational singing, and an emphasis on good works established greater equality in the church by breaking down many existing social hierarchies. Along with Quakers, eighteenth-century Methodists also took a strong anti-slavery stance that enhanced this denomination's attractiveness to African Americans (Morris n.p. [2008]:25; Dorsey 2011:18). Among the early Methodists in Easton were three men named McCallum, Martin, and Vansandt, who contributed, along with others, to the 1790 purchase of a lot in Easton (not on The Hill) for the exclusive use of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The church erected a chapel there (Harrison 1915:3) and it was presumably at this chapel that the Society for the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage held a meeting on September 18, 1792, which was advertised in the *Herald* (Morris N.p. [2008]:25). As a result of Methodism's openness and the antislavery attitudes running through it, African Americans joined the denomination in large numbers. By 1800, the Methodist Episcopal Church counted no fewer than 393 members of color in Talbot County, almost equal the number of white members. In adjacent Queen Anne County that year, members of color outnumbered white members (Methodist Episcopal Church 1813:241).

However, Methodist enthusiasm for abolition was always ambivalent and waned over time (Dorsey 2011:107–9). In the early years of the nineteenth century, the Talbot Circuit of the church enforced term slavery for its slaveholding members. A series of white Methodists submitted themselves to the circuit for judgment on the buying, selling, and holding of people in bondage. At the quarterly meeting of the Talbot circuit at Wye Meeting House on March 22, 1806, an Obediah Garey “brought forward a Negro Man that he bought. The conference with a general voice say that the said Negro shall serve ten years and then be free” (Methodist

Episcopal Church 1805–1837:450). At the next meeting (at Trappe, June 6, 1806), the Methodist brethren present charged a Joseph Fairbanks with selling a negro woman and child, “contrary to the Methodist Discipline” (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:451). But, when questioned about it, Fairbanks replied that he didn’t know it was against the Methodist rules and he was reinstated in the conference with all his former privileges (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:452). The committee tasked at the quarterly circuit meeting on March 22, 1806 with looking into the case of a Richard Grace, who had just purchased and wished to manumit a Mary Grace, determined that the said Mary should serve Richard until 1811, at which point he would have recouped the money he spent to buy her. The circuit directed him to procure a certificate from the county court to that extent (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:452). In these cases, the Methodist circuit enforced term slavery. They barred their members from selling slaves, though they apparently gave free passes pretty easily on this infraction, and they limited their members who bought slaves to only holding them in servitude long enough to recapture the loss—essentially, they turned slavery into indentured servitude. Methodists readily submitted to their conference the names of negroes they had purchased and requested the conference to determine the length of servitude (ex: Percy Brown, Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:453). They therefore turned to their religious community for guidance on moral questions regarding slavery and the community upheld a middle ground between bondage and emancipation. One September 18, 1806, the circuit formalized its supervision of its members over the question of term slavery: “This Conference requests, that such persons as are required to Manumit their Negroes to produce to this Conference a Certificate from the Clerks of this County to give such information as this Conference shall require” (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:458). Thereafter, individual cases did not make it into the circuit meeting minutes.

This enforcement of term slavery drew a middle ground between complete abolitionism and the expulsion of every slaveholder from membership, on the one hand, and tacit endorsement of slaveholding on the other. By 1836, American Methodists as a group were backing away from abolitionism. The national conference held in Cincinnati that year, worried about alienating Southern slaveowners, announced a national policy allowing slaveholding among members (Ohio Antislavery Society 1836). But, at least for a time, Methodism contributed directly to the growth of free black communities in Easton and elsewhere. As a result, many African Americans found a spiritual home within Methodism.

Though many in the Methodist Episcopal Church believed in greater equality, others did not. Black worshippers continued to face discrimination in leadership opportunities, seating in churches, and full participation. The most famous example of this kind of discrimination took place in Philadelphia, where, in 1787, a group of African-American Methodists walked out of St. George M.E. Church to form their own congregation after being pulled up off their knees during prayer for sitting in the wrong part of the church. Despite the walkout and continuing fights with the church leadership over self-governance, this Philadelphia group and most others remained within the Methodist Episcopal connection (Allen 1833:13).

In the Talbot County Circuit, despite large numbers of African-American members participating in Methodist classes since the eighteenth century, there is no record of African-American leadership in the church until 1835, when the circuit's quarterly minutes include a list of nine "colored" exhorters (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:555). That same meeting, the membership from Easton announced its intention to break away from the circuit and form its own circuit, which it did that year. Some of these colored exhorters most likely lived in Easton because they served the new Easton Circuit. The Easton Circuit elevated one of these exhorters,

Gilderoy Handy, to local preacher in 1836 (Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1847:6). How long these men worked within the Talbot Circuit before their official inclusion in its records is not clear. However, their exclusion from the minutes for thirty years certainly testifies to a second-class status within the local organization of the M.E. Church despite the large numbers of local Methodists of color.

While he was alive, Bishop Francis Asbury shielded Methodists of color from some discriminations and elevated black leadership within the church. In 1799, he ordained the leader of the Philadelphia walkout, Richard Allen, as a minister in the M.E. Church and thereby legitimizing Allen and his African-American congregation within the M.E. structure. As a sign of the controversial nature of this appointment among other church leaders, the General Conference did not approve the ordination until the following year. Asbury went on to ordain at least eight more of the twelve African Americans who joined the ranks of the M.E. clergy by 1815 (Moore N.p.). None of these early black ministers ever served the Talbot County Circuit, however (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837). Francis Asbury was a driving force for equality in the church, traveling annually throughout the United States and staying often in the homes of poorer Methodists rather than in the homes of the wealthy. When he died In 1816, African Americans lost their greatest champion in the church hierarchy and in the ensuing power struggle over the direction American Methodism would take, several groups of African Americans, led by Richard Allen and Daniel Coker, both ordained by Asbury in the M.E. Church, broke away to form their own denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The great majority of African-American Methodists, however, remained within the M.E. Church (Moore N.p.).

Changes in the structure of American Methodism make a depiction of African-Americans' precise place within the movement difficult, but it appears that they participated alongside white members in many aspects of the church and were separate in others. In the eighteenth century, the principle unit of Methodism was the class meeting. This was somewhat analogous to the Bible study meeting of today and essentially consisted of small gatherings of like-minded Christian people to read the Bible, discuss religious topics, pray together, and join in faithful communion. There were not enough ordained preachers to minister to all Methodists in these early years, so ministers traveled circuits, periodically visiting each place where there were Methodists to administer baptisms, marriages, and sacraments, and lead full worship services. Methodists lay leaders, along with local and circuit preachers, met quarterly at local, circuit conferences and annually at regional and national ones. The local conferences licensed local preachers and exhorters, while the general conference and bishops, like Francis Asbury, ordained the pastors who traveled the circuits. In the summer, Methodists gathered at rural camp meetings (Gary Moore, personal interview with the author, December 4, 2019). African Americans attended full worship services led by clergy alongside white Methodists, as they did at camp meetings. In both cases, segregation occurred more by sex than by race. Some class meetings included both white and black members, while others were made up exclusively of one race or the other (Moore N.p.). In Talbot County, by at least the 1830s and possibly earlier, the local quarterly meeting licensed several African-American men to preach and exhort. The circuits also periodically examined the character of these men in order to renew their licenses. Classes and circuit meetings alike took place in whatever place was convenient; chapels, private homes, and designated places in the woods met the needs of early Talbot Methodists (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837).



In the 1820s, '30s, and '40s, Methodists in Talbot County moved to organize into congregations, tied to physical church buildings, which emerged out of the earlier class system. As these congregations emerged, they began to separate Methodists along racial as well as congregational lines. A group of African Americans broke away first, when, in 1818, the Baltimore Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church sent Shadrach Bassett to Easton to organize a congregation. (Wayman 1881:1). Bethel A.M.E. Church acquired land on Hanson Street in 1820 and erected their house of worship there (Schmidt 2014:20). As happened elsewhere, the new church most likely drew its membership mainly from the Methodist Episcopal classes in Easton in which free African Americans were already members. Some of these black Methodists left the Methodist Episcopal Church but the majority remained in the older conference, which continued to include both black and white members.

In 1829, members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Easton replaced the then-aging chapel with a new brick structure, which they named Ebenezer M.E. Church. A meeting house had existed for use by local Methodists since about 1787, possibly on Washington Street, and one had stood on Goldsborough Street from 1790. Both these were timber frame structures and had limited life spans (Methodist Episcopal Church 1805–1837:540; Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1829–1937:1). The bill of incorporation for this congregation at Ebenezer limited membership to “free white male persons above the age of twenty one years,” who were eligible to vote for, and to serve on, the board of trustees. The core of the church was considered to consist of these members of the congregation, excluding women, children, and people of color (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1829–1937:3–4). Neither could these members hold office. On the death of Sexton Benjamin J. Barrow, April 7, 1842, the trustees of Ebenezer delegated two of their number to hire “a colored woman” to take over the duties of sexton “until

a more permanent arrangement can be made” (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1916:28), but the office of sexton was reserved for white members and Cornelius Clark was installed as new sexton May 3, 1843 (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1916:30; USDS 1840b). It is not clear whether any African Americans were members of Ebenezer’s congregation or whether the organization of Ebenezer marked a starting point in the racial segregation of Easton’s Methodist Episcopal church.

In either case, Easton’s African-American Methodists could not take on leadership in their local congregation. Ebenezer’s white members further aggravated the African-American community when they permitted Rev. John H. Kennard, an agent of the American Colonization Society, to hold a meeting at the church in June of 1837 (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1916:21)—by the 1830s, most free African Americans were antagonistic to efforts to colonize them in Liberia and regarded the Colonization Society as an attempt to get rid of the political problem that the existence of a free black population represented to white supremacy in the United States (Walker 1830; First Annual Convention of the People of Colour 1831:5; Second Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1832:9-10; Sterling 1998:23–29).

These racial tensions led African Americans to organize their own congregation. In 1836, Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church was formed with both black and white members (Fritz and Ludlow 1976a). Primary records of Asbury’s organization have not been available to this author. If African Americans originally participated as members of Ebenezer’s congregation, then they would appear to have exited sometime around 1835 or 1836. At this time, the trustees of Ebenezer Church ceased to use the adjective “white” when specifying voting members in church elections. While the founding Bill of Incorporation, denotes membership

only for “free *white* male persons above the age of twenty one years,” (emphasis added), the minutes of trustee meetings indicate that, in 1835, an election was made by “a number of duly qualified voters” (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1829–1937:15) and that, by 1841, the election of new trustees was made by “a number of male members over 21 years of age” (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1829–1937:26). Another election in 1844 for the same purpose was made by “a meeting of the male members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held in the School room” (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1829–1937:33). The racial specifier may have been dropped because it became superfluous in an all-white congregation. The alternative possibility is that Easton’s white Methodists organized the congregation at Ebenezer for themselves, as signified in the racial exclusion written into the bill of incorporation. In this case, African Americans would have continued to take part in the older class structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church and only organized into a congregation well after their white brethren had already done so.

Because the timing of this exit of certain members from the congregation at Ebenezer coincided with the national conference’s decision on slavery, the formation of Asbury Church may well be the result of a disagreement over how to respond to the national conference’s decision and the exiting body, in that case, may have represented Ebenezer’s African-American members and their supporters. At any rate, the formation of Asbury Church represented a further step toward the segregation of Easton’s Methodist Episcopal church family. Asbury’s congregation met first in a converted carriage shop on Dover Street before relocating to Higgins Street in 1844, when James and Elizabeth McNeal sold a lot on Higgins Street to the trustees of the M.E. Church in Easton for the purposes of erecting “a house or place of worship for the use of the colored members of the Methodist Episcopal Church” (Talbot County Court 1844–

1845:353–355; Fritz and Ludlow 1976a). This move rendered complete, at least at the local level, the separation of white and black Methodists in Easton.

Though they had left Ebenezer, worshippers at Asbury remained within the Methodist Episcopal conference. The Philadelphia regional conference of the church in 1851 still considered the Ebenezer and Asbury congregations as a single Easton church, though it noted two pastors for Easton (Methodist Episcopal Church 1856:555). A register of members of the several Methodist classes in Easton ca. 1856 included three Sunday night classes and one Monday night class of “colored” members, presumably meeting at Asbury, as well as several classes of white members (Methodist Episcopal Church 1849–1875:49–55). The Easton Circuit, redrawn out of a portion of the Talbot Circuit in 1835, periodically licensed African-American preachers and exhorters to serve the African-American brethren (Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1847). Still, several white pastors served this African-American congregation in the nineteenth century. A convention of “colored” preachers and laymen from M.E. churches in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware met in August 1852 and eventually formed a Conference of Colored Local Preachers in 1857, but Easton’s African-American members did not participate in this conference with their brethren (Cox 1917). The Easton congregation of Asbury continued instead within the Philadelphia conference, where annual church reports listed the number of “colored” members in Easton alongside the number of white members through 1864 (Methodist Episcopal Church 1864:30). Meanwhile, the Conference of Colored Local Preachers lobbied the national church for independence:

Among their annual concerns was advocating to have their own annual conference where they could enjoy some measure of dignity and self-determination, apart from the predominantly white, controlling Philadelphia and New Jersey annual conferences. They also voiced the strong desire, on behalf of black churches, to have black local preachers

ordained as full deacons and elders and appointed to serve those churches. However, their petitions to the General Conference every four years were constantly denied (Coleman 2015).

In 1864, the General Conference at long last answered this call and formed two conferences made up solely of African-American churches and clergy, one in Delaware and covering the Delmarva peninsula and the other in Washington, D.C. (Coleman 2015). Asbury Church in Easton joined this “colored” conference in 1865, becoming part of the Choptank district, and even hosted annual meetings (Methodist Episcopal Church 1865:137; Monroe 1884).

Ebenezer’s trustees formally released their financial interest in the Asbury property—and, with it, their power over the congregation—in 1871 when Asbury formed its own board of trustees (Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church 1835–1916:65). As part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Asbury took part in the reunification of most Methodist branches in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century and is today a member of the United Methodist Church.<sup>29</sup> Bethel Church remains today in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, within which it was founded in 1818.

Although free African Americans on The Hill were somewhat split between the congregations of Asbury and Bethel Churches, the two congregations stood together as a community. This solidarity can be seen in the architecture of both extant houses of worship. After meeting in wooden churches for many years, both Asbury and Bethel built larger, brick structures in the 1870s as the end of slavery swelled the size of Easton’s free African-American community and both the need for larger churches and the economic means to build them grew. Asbury’s new building was completed in 1876 and Bethel’s the following year (Fritz and

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<sup>29</sup> In this study, I sometimes refer to Asbury Church at various periods in its history by the conference of which it was a member during the period in question. Therefore, Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church and Asbury United Methodist Church are the same church.



**FIGURE 3.1:** Asbury United Methodist Church. This church has its origins in African-American involvement in local Methodism in the late eighteenth century and was organized in the antebellum period as a separate congregation. It remained within the Methodist Episcopal Church until that denomination's merger in the twentieth century, which created the United Methodist Church. The congregation purchased this lot in 1849 and the current building dates to 1876. The steeple was added later.

Ludlow 1976a; Fritz and Ludlow 1976b). Both of these still stand. In 1877, the Methodist Episcopal Church put out a pattern book for church plans, the detailed plans to which congregations could purchase in order to facilitate church construction without each congregation having to hire an architect to design a building from scratch (Board of Church Extension 1880:259). Neither Asbury, nor Bethel Churches had access to this resource during planning of their brick structures and neither church much resembles any of the patterns in the Methodist Episcopal pattern book (Kynett 1889). Instead, the two churches built in 1876 and 1877 are

almost identical in plan, dimensions, and construction to one another. Both are gable-fronted, rectangular-footprinted, two-story structures with a first-floor fellowship hall and second-floor sanctuary, reached by a pair of staircases on the right and left sides of the narthex. Both sanctuaries have balconies at the back. There are some minor differences between the two buildings in window shape and Bethel's church has two diagonally-set brick towers built into the

front corners of the building that do not appear on Asbury's façade. In subsequent years, Asbury added a steeple to their church. However, on the whole, the layouts of the buildings as originally constructed are identical.

The similarities between the churches reveal clear collaboration between the two congregations as they erected their brick buildings in the 1870s. In 1878, Frederick Douglass dedicated both structures in a single trip, speaking at both churches on the same day (*Easton Star* 1878:3; Fritz and Ludlow 1976b). Both Asbury and Bethel Churches still have the rostrums from that time, which they use weekly for services.

Archaeologists working on The Hill Community Project conducted Phase II and III investigations at Bethel A.M.E. Church in 2014 – 2015 and at Asbury United Methodist Church in 2016. Both churches first met in wooden houses of worship. These relationships between congregations reveal something of the nature of community among African Americans in Easton: unity of purpose and solidarity amid diversity. These tenets have shaped the African Methodism that formed the spiritual foundation of cultural life on The Hill and structured much of its social life as well. These principles are also on display in the archaeology of Asbury



**FIGURE 3.2:** Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. This congregation broke away from mainstream methodism in Easton to join the newly-formed A.M.E. denomination in 1818. Bethel's trustees purchased the property on Hanson Street in 1820 and the current church dates to 1877.

Church, particularly its association with education for African Americans in Easton and with regard to spiritual practice at the church.

### Church Involvement in Education

Archaeologists excavating on The Hill have found fragments of writing slates and slate pencils throughout the neighborhood. These are particularly concentrated at the two church sites of Asbury United Methodist and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal. Writing slates were used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to teach children to read and write. Children traced letters on the slate boards with pencils also of slate, leaving a thin white line that was visible until wiped away. This was a more sustainable way of teaching children their letters than using up large amounts of paper with lead or graphite pencils, as became common in the twentieth century. These slates indicate strong efforts in the neighborhood to promote literacy. Literacy was important to free African Americans because it had been denied them while enslaved and because it formed a key part of efforts among nineteenth-century African-American communities to claim their civil rights. Free African-American communities corresponded with one another, petitioned legislatures, published newspapers, and developed their own intellectual discourses to understand the social conditions they experienced. The concentration of writing implements at Asbury and Bethel signify the prominent roles that churches played in these efforts, both at the national level and here in Easton.

Archaeologists recovered higher concentrations of writing implements from both Asbury and Bethel Churches than from other sites. The Freeman site also displayed a higher concentration of writing implements than the other two domestic sites excavated as part of The



Hill Community Project. This may have to do with the intensive occupation of the site in the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries by several households. It is apparent from the archaeological record that African-American families taught literacy both at home and at church. The Talbot County Women’s Club site produced only one writing implement: a slate pencil in a mid-to-late twentieth-century occupation. It is unlikely that the pencil is associated with the activities of the women’s club, which bought the property in 1946, and the pencil is probably related to earlier nineteenth- or early twentieth-century white tenants—although it may be associated with the white families who owned the site between 1795 and 1891 or with the enslaved and free African-American servants who worked for them—and was redeposited later. The low count of writing implements at a predominantly white-occupied site suggests that literacy education for white residents in Easton took place mainly in the schools that were available to them and only to a very lesser extent in the home.

**Table 3.1: Writing Implement Concentrations at Archaeological Sites on The Hill**

	<b>Bethel A.M.E.</b>	<b>Asbury U.M.</b>	<b>Freeman Site</b>	<b>Home of the Family of the Buffalo Soldier</b>	<b>Talbot County Women’s Club Site</b>
<b>Writing Implements</b>	7	9	10	3	1
<b>Calibrated Count</b>	1.8	1.4	1.3	1	0.2

This table shows the combined counts of writing slates, slate pencils, wooden and graphite pencils, and rubber erasers at archaeological sites excavated on The Hill. Because the counts are impacted by the extent of excavation at each site, a calibrated count was calculated by dividing the count of writing implements by the number of 5’ x 5’ test units at each site. Smaller and incomplete test units are represented as fractions in this calculation. The resulting calibrated count demonstrates high concentrations of writing implements at both church sites.

Of the two churches, Bethel A.M.E. Church presents a somewhat complicated interpretive problem because the church lost most of its land for a period during the middle part of the nineteenth century and several houses were constructed on the lost portions at that time that do not bear a direct relationship to the congregation’s activities. It may be appropriate to

discount three slate pencil fragments and one wooden pencil fragment recovered from the mid-twentieth-century building destruction fill layers of one of these nineteenth-century houses. Doing so would decrease the calibrated count of writing implements at Bethel to 0.5. In that case, Asbury United Methodist Church stands out as the site with the highest concentration of literacy-related artifacts. These archaeological findings support the written and oral record of church involvement in education in Easton's African-American community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Asbury Church was particularly entwined with education, as was Bethel Church, to a lesser extent.

### *The meaning of education*

Christian churches have promoted literacy ever since the Protestant Reformation's rejection of priests as the sole access point to the divine invited individuals to read, understand, and interpret the Bible for themselves in their own vernacular tongues. Beginning in England in the 1780s and spreading to the United States in the 1790s, the Sunday School movement involved churches directly in education for youngsters, where church members provided informal instruction in reading, writing, basic arithmetic, and, most importantly, knowledge and understanding of the Bible (Davies 1961:218–221; Towns 1993:287–290). However, for African Americans in Easton in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, literacy carried additional urgency. They knew that they had been denied education up to then; they knew that learning held the keys to understanding their own oppression; and they knew that literacy offered them a means of making themselves heard and lifting their voices to advocate for themselves and their communities. These values of education were and are essential to full engagement in civic discourse and debate, as well as educated voting, in a democratic system. As a contributor to the

*Easton Gazette* put it in 1820, lack of education and education in a republican government “will either degenerate into anarchy or will pave the way for some ambitious despot to tyrannize over the liberties of the people;” on smaller scales, ignorance enables employers to cheat workers. Therefore, the subscriber argued, people must know their rights (*Easton Gazette and Eastern Shore Intelligencer* 1820a:3). As a result, education formed a key part of free African-Americans’ efforts to claim full citizenship as they extracted themselves from slavery, a struggle in which African-American churches were actively involved.

Slaveowners in nineteenth-century Maryland enforced bans on teaching slaves to read as a means of tamping down any independent thought that might challenge the legitimacy of slavery. When Sophia Auld began teaching a young, enslaved Frederick Bailey his letters, sometime around 1826 (Mintz and McNeil 2018), her husband flew into a rage. “Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world,” he told her. “it would forever unfit him for the duties of a slave...learning would do him no good, but probably a great deal of harm—making him disconsolate and unhappy.” The young Bailey took to heart this message, which he penned in his autobiography in 1855 as a free man under his new name, Frederick Douglass: “‘Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.’ I immediately assented to the proposition; and from that moment I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom” (Douglass 1855:146). What Douglass immediately grasped at the time, what he later described in his narratives, and what he lived out in his life is that education enables someone who is oppressed to grasp the extent and nature of their oppression and to see and to imagine alternative social conditions. Acknowledging these possibilities and possessing at least something of a means of achieving them fuels the fire of resentment and, when properly stoked, moves one to action. The first step, then, in throwing off

the chains on the body, is to throw off the chains on the mind that bind one to acceptance of oppression as either the natural way of things or as an unassailable social fact.

Free African Americans outside of bondage remained hungry for knowledge. In 1865, black phrenologist Dr. H. Jerome Brown visited Easton on a lecture tour. Brown offered in himself a prime example of the possibilities of education. Writing to the *Christian Recorder* of the visit, one Easton resident noted their pleasure at being able to hear such a lecture on the past and present theories by a person of color: "It was new to us in this isolated spot to have a man of our own identity speaking among us, discussing the mental philosophers of the past, and comparing them with the newly discovered metaphysical conclusions of the present hour" (D. 1865).<sup>30</sup> In all, Dr. Brown gave five lectures in Easton, where black and white residents came out together to hear him speak (D. 1865).

Phrenology was a nineteenth-century pseudo-science with strong predilections toward enforcing racial hierarchy, but a handful of African Americans like Brown managed to twist the field of study into an anti-racist message by focusing on its conceptualization of personal improvement through education. Phrenology, the study of the shape and size of the head with particular attention to "bumps" as supposed indications of mental skills and personality, was based on the mapping of faculties onto the brain and the measurement of deviation from an ideal type as diagnosis of areas of imperfection in a person's capabilities and character. Because most phrenologists used a "Eurocentric model of aesthetic beauty when mapping the organs upon the standard phrenological model of the head" they virtually assured "that deviations from this norm would become markers of personal and racial inferiority." The field was thus fraught with racial

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<sup>30</sup> It was most likely Charles Dobson who wrote this review and news story for the *Christian Recorder*, which is signed "C.D." Dobson wrote the newspaper two months prior on another matter (Dobson 1865). Dobson's correspondence shows he was an active member of the A.M.E. Church.

bias and supported much of the scientific racism of the period (Hamilton 2008:175–177). But many phrenologists also endorsed education as capable of improving intelligence through exercise of the brain, like any other muscle (Hamilton 2008:175). George Combe argued that the freedmen of the northern states had larger heads than the slaves of the South, ““most probably...from their freedom having brought the moral and intellectual faculties into more active employment, which has produced a gradual improvement of the organs.”” Writes historian Cynthia Hamilton,

If we can overlook the racist assumptions that lie behind this statement, what we see is an affirmation of the importance of circumstances and environment to the development of full human potentialities—and an assertion of the perfectibility of human nature. This was strong stuff that was capable of subverting the underlying racism (Hamilton 2008:180).

O.S. Fowler, college roommate of abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher, pushed the idea of self-improvement hard in his works in phrenology. So, when the *Christian Recorder* in 1861 described Jerome Brown as ““a second Fowler, though a colored man,”” the editors mean at least in part that Brown had seized on the intellectual grounds in phrenology that provided for improvement through education and for the great potential among African Americans, no matter the limitations that slavery had put upon them (Hamilton 2008:179–180).

In his lectures in Easton in 1865, Brown reiterated the potential for racial improvement and advocated strongly for education, literacy, and the active use of those faculties. He commented on the advancement thus far of African-Americans toward social equality and argued that there was equal moral improvement to be made by the white man in curbing savagery and cruelty. ““He also eulogized highly the *Christian Recorder* and *Anglo-African* [two African-American newspapers], saying that every colored family in town should subscribe to one or the other, which I think will have a salutary effect,”” wrote an observer from Easton’s African-American community. These messages met with an enthusiastic response in Easton: ““After an

hour and a half the address was closed amid the applause of a once benighted and enslaved community” (D. 1865). Within a few short years, Easton’s African Americans would be able to attend school and actively pursue the education that they saw as vital to their advancement in society.

Discourses at the national level when free African-American communities came together to work toward common goals also demonstrated the primacy of education and schooling in the collective psyche of nineteenth-century African America. Education was a chief concern of the Colored Conventions, which began in 1830 in order to facilitate national-level collaboration between free African-American communities. The second national convention in 1832 began a conversation about establishing a secondary school for free students of color, arguing that primary schools were insufficient in a modern age (Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1832:27). Henry Sipkens, president of the convention, discussed the meaning of education for free African Americans in his concluding address:

We must have Colleges and high Schools on the Manual Labor system, where our youth may be instructed in all the arts of civilized life. If we ever expect to see the influence of prejudice decrease, and ourselves respected, it must be by the blessings of an enlightened education. It must be by being in possession of that classical knowledge which promotes genius, and causes man to soar up to those high intellectual enjoyments and acquirements, which places him in a situation, to shed upon a country and a people, that scientific grandeur which is imperishable by time, and drowns in oblivions cup their moral degradation. Those who think that our primary schools are capable of effecting this, are a century behind the age, when to have proved a question in the rule of three, was considered a higher attainment, than solving the most difficult problem in Euclid is now. They might have at that time performed, what some people expect of them now, in the then barren state of science, but they are now no longer capable of reflecting brilliancy on our national character, which will elevate us from our present situation (Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1832:34–35).

For Sipkens, the value of education lay in its ability to unlock African-American talents. He hoped that African Americans might earn the respect that was due them once they could show

the world of what high achievements they were capable. The convention the next year discussed the establishment of several further schools in Connecticut, New York, and Philadelphia and various arrangements for their financial support (Third Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1833).

State colored conventions also took up the question of schools. In Baltimore in 1852, the Maryland Free Colored People's Convention

Resolved, That this Convention recommend to the colored people of Maryland the formation of societies in the counties of this State and the city of Baltimore, who shall meet monthly, for the purpose of raising means to establish and support free schools for the education of our poor and destitute children" (*Sun* 1852:1).

At this meeting, Charles Dobson and Joseph Bantem [or Bantum] of Easton represented Talbot's free African-American communities and their interests (USDI 1850c:14,19; *Sun* 1852:1).

Easton's free African-American community thus took part in these larger discussions about education at the colored conventions.

On a visit to Easton in 1878, Jacob C. Hazeley, a self-styled "professor" from Sierra Leone who traveled as a lecturer (Massey 1887), described education as power to speak and be heard, as a means to power. Rev. G.W. Young (1878) of Trappe, MD, who had set up the lecture in Easton, summarizes the argument:

He spoke of the position Fred Douglass now holds, of Dr. Turner, publisher, and Dr. Tanner Editor of CHRISTIAN RECORDER, spoke of Rev. R. H. Cain, Bishops Payne, Brown and Wayman. If these men were without education, they would be obliged to be silent; they would have been unknown; but here these men with education which is power, their voices are heard through the length and breadth of America and to places where they never have been. Before we can be a people of position and of power, we must get education.

Hazeley's view on education was more actively political than Sipkens' and his emphasis on speech focuses the core of education on subjects like philosophy, rhetoric, and—above all—literacy. His message reached an eager audience in Easton.

African-American views on education thus spanned the spectrum of opinion on racial uplift strategies. Nineteenth-century African Americans thought of schooling sometimes as a thing lost and denied them, at times as means to intellectual freedom, at others a means to personal and professional success, and both as a pathway to eventual equality through hard-earned respect and a means for asserting equality now. No matter their views, African Americans almost wholly agreed on the vitality of education to the improvement of their place in society.

The church was an ever-present force in these discourses on the meaning of education and efforts to provide it for African-American children. Church ministers and members participated actively in the colored conventions as they worked on the question of education. Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, the headquarters of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, hosted several of the first colored conventions (Colored Conventions N.d.) beginning in 1830. When this first precursor meeting to the conventions, which started the next year in 1831, established a “parent society” to organize subsequent colored conventions, it selected Rev. Richard Allen, presiding bishop of the A.M.E. Church, as its president and counted among its board of managers Shadrack Bassett, who had preached the first A.M.E. service in Easton in 1818 (American Society of Free Persons of Colour 1831:8). Charles Dobson, who represented Easton and Talbot County in the Maryland colored convention in 1852, was an active member of Bethel A.M.E. Church, as his writings to the denominational newspaper the *Christian Recorder* attest. He is also the likely author of the aforementioned piece on Jerome Brown’s lectures on phrenology in support of racial improvement, and education. “Professor” Hazeley’s comments on education in his lecture in Easton in 1878 came at the invitation of the minister of a nearby church, Rev. Young of Trappe. Bassett, Dobson, and Young therefore



anchor the juncture of church and education, which occurred among and throughout African-American communities, locally in Easton.

The Protestant valuation of literacy and local churches' service to their communities framed the quest for education among Easton's free African-American community in the nineteenth century. African Americans saw education as a vital tool in conceptualizing and realizing their freedom and the church supported them in their pursuit of knowledge. Asbury and Bethel churches continued to play important roles as African-American residents here aggressively pursued education in the latter nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The history of black schools in Easton helps to further explain how the writing slates and pencils came to Asbury and Bethel churches and what they signify for the relationship between religion and education for free African Americans in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Easton.

#### *Sunday Schools for African-American students in Easton and Talbot County*

Throughout the history of schools for African Americans in Easton, the churches remained consistent in their support for education. Churches provided intellectual grounding for the importance of education and encouragement for teachers and worked to address inequalities in educational opportunities by raising funds to fill budget shortfalls and offering up space for school activities. The involvement of churches in education also helped to strengthen the integration of teachers into Easton's African-American community.

Until the 1860s, the only schools in Talbot County that I have been able to find that served African Americans were the church Sunday schools. The Sunday school movement began in the 1780s in England, as the Industrial Revolution gained steam, as an effort to provide at least some instruction and moral guidance for the working-class children who labored long

hours in factories and only had Sundays off (Davies 1961:218; Towns 1993:287). Newspaper editor Robert Raikes, who was concerned over overcrowded jails and the plights both of the men and women inside them and the children left parentless outside, established the first school in Gloucester in 1780 and launched the movement in 1783 when he published in his newspaper the first news of his successes. Sunday schools were initially nondenominational but became more sectarian over time as churches became more involved. As this shift occurred, Anglicans and Methodists often formed their own denominational Sunday schools and schools shifted from paid professional teachers to volunteers, with older students and former students often teaching the younger children (Davies 1961:219–221; Towns 1993:289). Still, the focus remained on elementary education. The curriculum included reading, writing—using the Bible as a textbook—and basic arithmetic. Sunday schools offered more standardization and broader accessibility to elementary education than private “dame schools,” where children took lessons from untrained women whose instructional skill varied widely (Davies 1961:217). Sunday schools thus marked a step toward universal education and they became rapidly popular throughout Britain.

Sunday schools took hold in the United States almost as soon as they began to spread in England, though they took on a distinctly more denominational and evangelical nature. “The first recorded American Sunday school was held in 1785 at Oak Grove, Virginia, by William Elliot. Both whites and blacks were instructed but at separate hours” (Towns 1993:289). Methodists were particularly active and early in starting Sunday schools. John Wesley was so taken with the success in moral improvement that Raikes reported in his first students in 1783 that he urged, ““There must be a Sunday school wherever there is a Methodist Society”” (Towns 1993:288). In the United States, Francis Asbury founded a school in Virginia in 1786 and more

schools soon spread to South Carolina, Maryland, Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania (Towns 1993:290).

Whereas the Sunday schools in England were focused mainly on general education, Sunday schools in the U.S. were “tied heavily to evangelism.” Nondenominational schools were therefore less popular and successful than those operated by individual denominations (Towns 1993:290). Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there was little standardization or collaboration between Sunday schools. In most congregations, ministers gave the lessons to the teachers at a weekly meeting and these in turn passed on the identical lesson to their pupils on Sunday. After the Civil War, greater communication, support, and standardization developed between Sunday schools and between denominations in the form of regularly-published Sunday school literature and conventions, or rallies, to energize Sunday school teachers and leaders (Towns 1993:292–293). The early twentieth century saw a turn toward liberalism and an opening of Sunday schools to debates on theological topics, including evolution (Towns 1993:293).

Given the rapid rise of Sunday schools in the United States in the late eighteenth century, particularly in areas of strong Methodism, it would have been likely for Easton to have had one or more Sunday schools from the town’s inception in the 1780s. However, the town did not form a Sunday school, by name, until 1822. The *Republican Star* announced the opening of a charity school for girls in 1803 that would have served some of the functions of a Sunday school as they were conceived in the Federal period. The charity school aimed to serve “orphan children, and such as the indigence of their parents will not admit of giving them schooling” (*Republican Star and Eastern Shore General Advertiser* 1803:3). In 1819, R.P. Emmons organized a school in Easton on the Lancastrian monitor method of instruction, where teachers worked with several older students to teach younger students. This model of school was

designed to facilitate the education of larger numbers of children with an economy of trained teacher's time and, therefore, an economy of funds. In many ways, its delegative structure resembled that of the early Sunday schools, though they were not technically Sunday schools. The Lancastrian method was designed to meet the needs of poorer classes of people who could not afford to pay the fees requisite in a system with a lower ratio of students to teachers, but it was largely limited in effectiveness to basic elementary education. Emmons had already established a successful school in nearby Oxford before opening one in Easton and his school proved satisfactorily successful to Easton's parents and one contributor to the *Easton Gazette* in 1820 commended Emmons' students on their rapid advancement. Some students from the Lancastrian school, and others whose parents sent them to boarding and dame schools or educated them at home for their early lessons, continued on to the male and female academies in Easton that taught such subjects as mathematics, history, geography, and rhetoric (*Republican Star or Eastern Shore Political Luminary* 1800:3; Course 1802; Hammond 1802; Macenas 1820:1; Darden 1819:3). The records of these schooling options in and near Easton in the early nineteenth century do not typically denote the races of their students but it seems doubtful that many, if any, students of color were able to avail themselves of these programs.

Government supported the efforts of these schools. By 1819, the state legislature was in the habit of giving loans to schools (*Easton Gazette and Eastern Shore Intelligencer* 1819a:1; *Easton Gazette and Eastern Shore Intelligencer* 1819b:1). By at least 1820, Talbot County had a School Fund "for the education of the poor children of Talbot County" and a controversy arose in July of that year over the proper expenditure of those funds (*Easton Gazette and Eastern Shore Intelligencer* 1820b:2). Easton's residents in the town's first generation therefore took

part in the movement to educate the poor that the Sunday school movement represented but a nominal Sunday school did not appear for some years more.

Easton's residents finally organized a Sunday school in 1822. In March of that year, a male Sunday school society organized to run a school for boys. A female Sunday school society formed at the same time, folded under the upper leadership of the male society but with its own board of directors. Classes began in April (Handy 1822; Ring 1822; Smith et al. 1822a; Smith et al. 1822b). Both the Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal churches in Easton participated in supporting Easton's Sunday schools (*Republican Star* 1829:3; *Republican Star* 1832:3). It is not entirely clear whether they coordinated their efforts or whether they ran separate schools, though the former seems likely, at least at first.

African Americans took part in these early Sunday schools in Easton, though in racially segregated classes. The first Sunday school in the United States, in Virginia in 1785, had included African Americans—albeit in a separate class (Towns 1993:289). In Easton, the case was likewise. The Female Sunday School Society's first public report in July of 1822 describes the school as comprised of six classes. The report lists the literacy level and progress of the first five classes in descending order from those who were able to memorize Bible passages to the youngest, whose attention the teachers had trouble maintaining and who had not yet learned to read; the report lists then the sixth class, taught by a Mrs. Frances Wilmer, which had achieved some literacy and were "spelling or in their letters" (Smith et al. 1822b). The 1820 census for the town of Easton lists a Michael Wilmore, free man of color, married and with three children (USDS 1820:11a). Since no other heads of household had similar names, Frances Wilmer [sic.] was most likely Michael's wife. She was thus the teacher for the African-American class and the African-American representative on the board of the female Sunday school in Easton. While the

other Sunday school classes are divided according to skill level, her class included readers of various degrees of literacy, all in one class but learning from her at their own paces. If the Episcopal and Methodist Sunday schools were joint, then this would have been the only class at the time available to Easton's African-American residents. If they were separate and Wilmore's class was based in the Episcopal Church, which seems equally likely from the newspaper reports at this time, then the Methodist Episcopal Sunday school most likely had its own African-American class too. After all, Easton's M.E. church was still racially integrated in 1822 and the African-American members had not yet left to form Asbury Church.

There is no other indication in the newspaper reports in the *Republican Star* or the *Easton Gazette* from 1799 through the 1820s that any schools other than Sunday schools were available to African Americans. These papers document several schools: the male and female academies, the Lancastrian school, several boarding schools, and even dancing schools. Although none specifically say that they were for white students only, there is no other specific mention of schools for students of color and it may be reasonably deduced that whatever additional options, if any, there may have been were extremely limited at this time. The Sunday school thus filled, however meagerly, a vital gap in education for Easton's African Americans in the 1820s. Since American Sunday schools tended to follow more sectarian lines than their nondenominational counterparts in England, as Bethel A.M.E. Church established itself in that decade, and as Asbury M.E. Church broke off from Ebenezer in 1836, these African-American congregations most likely started their own Sunday schools and news of these simply did not reach the papers. Sunday schools may have continued to be the only avenue for African-American education in Easton until Sarah Armstrong's school in the 1860s.

Easton's Sunday schools probably functioned much like those elsewhere in the United States and Britain. Early Sunday schools focused principally on teaching students to read and write, eventually reaching Bible study for those who mastered basic literacy (Davies 1961:219,221). Elementary arithmetic was sometimes a part of the curriculum for some advanced students. Not all students reached these advanced classes and most attended only for a few years before leaving (Davies 1961:223).

Education in these schools was a community affair. Teachers donated their time and, as the years went on, many former students returned to teach the next cohort, including their own children (Davies 1961:219; Towns 1993:289). Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there was little standardization or collaboration between American Sunday schools. Commentator Clarence Benson has called it “‘the Babel period’ because there was no Sunday school literature. Each teacher taught the Word of God the best that he could. Many Sunday schools during this period followed the successful technique later used by the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, where the pastor instructs his people at the teachers’ meeting. On Sunday the teachers give the identical lesson to their pupils” (Towns 1993:292). After the Civil War, greater communication, support, and standardization developed between Sunday schools and between denominations as published curriculums and annual conventions developed (Towns 1993:292–293).

In Britain, Sunday schools transformed over time into day schools and to universal government-sponsored elementary education (Davies 1961:222–223). In the United States, they followed a similar path—the legislation is fairly similar in content and timing around 1860–1870. In Maryland, the legislature enacted a universal system of free public education in 1865, governed by a state superintendent of schools (State of Maryland 1865). The system of “public instruction” established by the 1865 act was amended several times, at the insistence of African-

American communities in the state, until it adequately provided for black schools, however meagerly funded (State of Maryland 1868; State of Maryland 1872). These involvements of the government in primary education, in Maryland as well as in Britain, took over the job of teaching literacy that the Sunday schools had performed. Rather than transition into elementary day schools, as did English Sunday schools, American Sunday schools thereafter focused more directly on religious instruction (Towns 1993). Even as other schools became available in the 1860s and onward, African Americans in Easton and elsewhere continued to hold Sunday schools. The Methodist Episcopal Church's annual conference report in 1865 counted nine African-American Sunday schools [probably nine individual classes] in Easton, operated by 24 staff and teachers and serving 319 scholars (Methodist Episcopal Church 1865:137). By 1900, Asbury church held a Sunday school with 22 teachers and 225 scholars (Methodist Episcopal Church 1900:170), with similar numbers in 1920 (Methodist Episcopal Church 1920:344). I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 how keen African-American communities were on the importance of their Sunday schools.

Sunday schools connected the generations as older members of the communities and congregations that sponsored them donated their time to teach children. These schools also connected neighborhood children together. Current resident Barney Brooks played mostly with children with whom he attended Sunday school at Asbury Church. They had a large Sunday-school class with lots of children in the church when he was growing up in the 1930s and '40s (Barney Brooks, oral history interview with the author, 6 October 2018). These sorts of connections among children provided the foundation for the relationships that would carry them through life with the support of their community.



## *Secular schools in Easton*

African Americans in Easton gained greater access to schools in the 1860s. Between 1863 and 1868, Sarah Anne Armstrong taught at a school for children of color that she started in Easton. Born free in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1830, Armstrong was an African-American woman who dedicated her life to teaching. At age 15, she became a teacher in the A.M.E. church in which she had grown up; at 17, a teacher in the public school (which was integrated in New Bedford). She then taught in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Canada. Her work in Easton came on the heels of a two-year mission trip to Africa with the Episcopal Church, which she had joined, in 1861–1863. The calling to teach in the South came to Armstrong with a religious urgency: “the Macedonia cry came up from the South, ‘Come and help us.’” In Easton, “she did a great service, both to the parents and children. She was instrumental in building a fine schoolhouse and paid for it” (Williams 1869). What came of Armstrong’s school after she left to teach in New Jersey in 1868 is uncertain.

In 1870, the Freedman’s Bureau sponsored a school in Easton on Port Street. The Talbot County Board of Commissioners appointed a board of trustees and named it the Easton Colored School (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017). Two years later, the state legislature passed the Maryland State School Law of 1872, which provided for public schools for all children. This law repealed and replaced the one from four years earlier that had been inadequate to the needs of the state. Among other changes, the 1872 law provided stronger language supporting schools for “colored” children. In 1868, Maryland directed each county to set aside

the total amount of taxes paid for school purposes by the colored people of any county, or in the city of Baltimore, together with any donations that may be made for the purpose... for the maintaining the schools for colored children, which schools... shall be subject to

such rules and regulations as said respective Boards shall prescribe (State of Maryland 1868:766).

By requiring counties only to set aside the money and allowing them to set whatever rules they desired, the state gave resistant county boards of education a sizeable loophole through which to avoid actually providing schools of any caliber—or any schools at all. The 1872 law gave them a clearer directive:

It shall be the duty of the Board of County School Commissioners to establish one or more public schools in each election district for all colored youth between six and twenty years of age, to which admission shall be free, and which shall be kept open as long as the other public schools of the particular county; provided, the average attendance be not less than fifteen scholars” (State of Maryland 1872:650).

From 1872 on, Easton’s “colored” school received support and oversight from both the state and the county. However, that support was often insufficient.

In 1872, Maryland appropriated \$50,000 in funding for black schools, but appropriated the funds in such a way that Rev. Charles R. Horsey of neighboring Delaware, at the colored convention in that state the following year, described Maryland’s funding as “mere ‘hush money’” (Convention of Colored People 1873:5). As G.W. Milford, a teacher at the Easton Colored School, explained to the readers of the *Christian Recorder* in 1884, the chief hurdle to quality education at the school was consistently the “inadequacy of funds.” Milford described how the black schools were not funded in the same way as the white schools and were funded at a much lower rate. Since 1878, white schools received \$400,000 annually, plus the interest on an endowment of \$900,000 “and the product of certain fines, licenses and intestate estates,” while African-American schools received only \$50,000 annually in 1872 and \$100,000 from 1874 onward (Milford 1884). The white schools in Maryland therefore received funding disproportionately higher than the ratio of white to African-American residents in Maryland at the time (USDI 1883:378). Add to this imbalance the severe starting disadvantage to black

schools entailed by 250 years of unpaid slave labor and poverty among free African Americans, which meant that most black schools after the Civil War were starting from scratch, and the significant result of this funding differential was lower-quality education for black students, which Milford documents:

The Easton colored school, in which I have the honor to labor, has 196 scholars... The colored teachers of Talbot county are, as a rule, well qualified, bringing much experience to the work. Mr. Alex Chaplain, the examiner of the public schools, declare that he is determined not to have any other kind. Five or six of the thirteen colored school buildings of the county are 'bran new stuff stuffed with new bran,' having the best facilities and appliances, and being in happy contrast to some of the rest. As a generalizing the scholars take much interest in the studies, and had they more incentives to exertion, we might have the highest hope of their future fortunes (Milford 1884).

Milford makes a case for integrated schools on the basis that students would learn much from each other in addition to the official curriculum.<sup>31</sup> In the absence of integration, he makes a case for having colored teachers in colored schools so that the salaries of the teachers may support and lift up the colored communities. He refers to an "examination of 1880" as evidence that there are qualified black teachers (Milford 1884).

However good their teachers were, though, black students received far fewer days of instruction than their white peers. The black and white schools were both meant to run for ten months (State of Maryland 1872:638,650), but that was impossible to maintain with available funding. Milford notes that, by 1884, black schools in Talbot County

used to run 10 months, but for the last three years they have been coming short of that number of months, running last year 8 months, and the year previous to that again 7 1/2 months. But I find it stated in error in the report of the State school board for 1882-83, that they run ten months. The same report says the colored schools of Caroline county ran 9 months, which is far from the fact in the case. The colored schools of Caroline county never ran over 5 or 6 months. The school law says the colored schools shall run the same number of months the white schools run, providing they maintain an average attendance of 15 scholars, and I do not see why the law should be broken. Abolish the law, rather

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<sup>31</sup> This is much the same argument used in the twenty-first century to support diversity in education.

allow it to remain a dead letter. The dignity of the school law ought to be supported by a faithful compliance therewith (Milford 1884).

Milford's indictment of the schools system for providing markedly less education to students of color and then for falsifying the records of this inequality displays a system rigged against students of color. Even the best teachers in African-American schools could only work with the resources they had.

Churches stepped up to help relieve the burden on schools as best they could. "The clergy," notes Milford (1884), "with rare exceptions do all they can to aid us in our educational work. Occasionally I meet an old fogey, who in his vaunting platitudes and gross ignorance, pretends to know all God's plans and purposes, and persistently seeks to throw a damper upon education. The church and the school are very closely related, and the one can do much to help the other, if it will." The relationship between the church and the schools was equally close in neighboring Trappe, eight miles south of Easton. In 1878, the white people in Trappe had closed the public schools in the area, allegedly for lack of money, and Rev. G.W. Young of the local black church had tried in vain to convince his people that they needed to pay for private schooling until such time as the public schools reopened. At Young's invitation, "Professor" Jacob C. Hazely came to Easton to give the lecture mentioned above on the importance of education. After he concluded his remarks, Hazely then led the donations himself and enough money was collected to reopen the school and pay the teacher's salary (Young 1878).

Consistently inadequate funding for the Easton Colored School led the community to partner in the early twentieth century with the Rosenwald Fund to build a new schoolhouse. The United States Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 reiterated the directive in the 1872 Maryland public schools law that racially separate accommodations must be of equal

caliber. However, conditions at the Easton Colored School on Port Street remained subpar even compared to other African-American schools:

In 1916, the State Educational Survey Commission reported that the Port Street School was one of the poorest buildings in the state. That year a delegation from the Easton Colored School appeared before the Board of County School Commissioners and presented a plan to raise \$1000 to aid in the erection of a new building. Following several delays, construction began in 1918 and the new building was dedicated on Friday, February 21, 1919 (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017).

This new school was a combined effort, financially, of Easton's African-American families, the county school board, which contributed \$6,000, and the Rosenwald Foundation, which gave \$500 (Fisk University 2001).

On November 21, 1937, the Easton Colored School was renamed Robert Russa Moton High School, after a prominent African-American educator of the time and second head of the Tuskegee Institute, after the death of Booker T. Washington. Robert Moton had worked behind the scenes to help set up the Rosenwald schools program (Moton High school Alumni Association 2017; Public Broadcasting System N.d.). The Moton school in Easton at this point “consisted of five buildings on Port Street and one on Higgins. They housed an elementary school, high school, industrial arts facility, and home cottage” (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017). Vocational education made up an important part of the curriculum at Moton. The high school included an agriculture and a home economics department. These programs collaborated with the national organizations of the New Farmers of America and New Homemakers of America to hold fairs with exhibits and prizes for student achievement in these fields (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017).

With no foreknowledge of the *Brown v. Board* ruling in store in 1954, Talbot County began construction of a new African-American high school on Glenwood Avenue in the early 1950s. The new Moton High School opened in 1953 and Dobson Elementary School—also for

African Americans—opened beside it five years later (Walter Black, oral history interview with Angela Howell N.d. [2014]; Connolly 2017). After the new schools opened, the Board of Education closed the facilities on Port Street. “Ole Moton,” as students who went to the new Moton School on Glenwood referred to the former school, became an apartment building (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017). Despite the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board*, Talbot County held out on integrating schools until 1967 and the new Moton School on Glenwood served 14 years as the high school for African Americans in Easton. The Segregation-era Moton and Dobson schools on Glenwood Avenue were renovated in 1991 and 1992 and have served as Easton’s elementary schools since that time (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017; Talbot County Public Schools 2016:11) but will be torn down in 2020 when a new, adjacent building takes their place (Drury 2016).

During the lives of the segregated Moton and Dobson schools, the African-American students and teachers there shared relationships that went beyond the classroom and into the community. Easton’s African-American churches, particularly Asbury Church, played key roles in fostering these relationships, which resulted in strong support networks based on personal relationships. Older current residents remember these close relationships in oral history interviews. Carlene Phoenix, who grew up in The Bottom neighborhood off of Port Street but whose uncle lived on The Hill, says:

I actually—I really enjoyed segregated schools because we lived in a neighborhood...where our teachers lived with us. So it was always nice that you had your teacher lived next-door. Almost all of my teachers lived in the neighborhood and I can remember—um—helping, going to the teachers’ homes—um—gettin’ help with homework. I even remember, as I got older, goin’ to the classroom with teachers and getting their classroom set up. So, when I went to—uh, say, sixth grade, then I helped my fifth-grade teacher set up their new classroom for her new class. Another thing was you just had that sense of your teacher—you were close with your teacher. You had a good relationship. Because not only was that person a part of your school system, but

they was also a part of you when you came home (Carlene Phoenix, oral history interview 23 June 2014).

Having teachers in the neighborhood was therefore a great boon to education. Because of racial segregation in housing in Easton, African-American teachers had the same limited options for where to live in the town as the families they served. While some lived in The Bottom around Port Street and Hammond Street, where Phoenix's family resided, the majority lived on The Hill. Most of the teachers lived near Asbury Church. As Barney Brooks recalls:

They had boarding houses—that's the only place they could stay...One was...right next-door to this church—the big house, Mr. Downes—they had schoolteachers. The house next to him, Mr. Johnson—they had schoolteachers. And then, over on Locust Street, a couple of teachers was over there (Barney Brooks, oral history interview with Angela Howell 30 April, 2014).

By boarding in the community, teachers had immediate, extracurricular interactions with their students, their students' parents, and with other neighbors as well. These diverse contacts enriched the teacher-student relationship and promoted a culture that strongly valued education.

One of the teachers who was active in the Asbury congregation was Daniel Ridout, Jr., music teacher at Moton High School before Integration. His father, Daniel Lyman Ridout Sr., had been a talented musician and third-generation Methodist minister who sat on the committee to revise the Methodist Church hymnal in the mid-1960s and wrote and arranged several hymns that were included in the resulting volume. One of Ridout Sr.'s arrangements was "Stand By Me [When the Storms of Life Are Raging]," originally composed in 1905 by Charles Albert Tindley of nearby Berlin, Maryland (Dumpson N.d.; Hymnary N.d.a; Hymnary N.d.b). The younger Daniel Ridout, in addition to teaching music at Moton, led a Great Hymns choir, composed of the best singers from various churches in Talbot County, which gave concerts throughout the region (Eric Dashiell, oral history interview with Yvonne Freeman, 27 July 2015).

The involvement of teachers in the Asbury congregation and living close to the church created a strong support for education in the congregational culture of that church. Edith Hayman, who was born on The Hill in 1934 and who worshipped at Asbury, credited this culture with inspiring the ambitions of her peers, who attended higher education at greater rates than many African Americans on the Eastern Shore at the time:

I think it was the atmosphere of this church that sent a lot of them away from here. Uh—we had—uh—people that went to college. It wasn't college then—they went to Princess Anne. It was called Princess Anne Academy I think, then. So a lot of the people that—that were teachers and—and, uh, administrators of the church when we were in school and when I was in school had gone to Princess Anne or had gone to Morgan. So they came back and they were a help to us. And their aim for us, I think, was: do something better. And then we had a lot of teachers that—that were members of the church (Edith Hayman, oral history interview 31 March 2012).

While more teachers were affiliated with Asbury Church than with other churches, the involvement of churches in education and the culture of support in the churches for upward mobility and the struggle for equality cut across denominations and congregations. “Mostly everything was church-oriented. Our conferences were here at the church and—uh—during the Civil Rights area [Era] all the meetings were here. Head Start started here. It was a place of importance to the community. It was community-oriented—uh, uh—we knew everyone out here and even if you went to another church, we went to another church, it wasn't like ‘Okay, you're a Methodist and you stay here,’ but we went to—matter of fact, our Vacation Bible Schools were—were with the Baptist church and the A.M.E. church and we joined together” (Edith Hayman, oral history interview 31 March 2012).

The close personal relationships with teachers, inter-congregational connections, and close-knit community sentiment in Easton among African Americans broadened the raising and instruction of children. “If you look at the way children are now and compare that to the way we were growin' up, we—we knew that any advice came from anyone—not just—it didn't have to



be the family—because we knew they were doin’ something for our benefit. It wasn’t hard to understand why either. Because you were—you were brought up to have respect for those people” (Barney Brooks, oral history interview with Angela Howell, 30 April, 2014). These relationships among neighbors, extended family, and church family created the social substance behind the adage that “it takes a village to raise a child.” In the first half of the twentieth century, this strong sense of community on The Hill and between The Hill and the other African-American neighborhoods in Easton promoted a strong value of education despite the limited resources school segregation allowed to black folks.<sup>32</sup>

Asbury Church’s close association with Easton’s African-American schools is most physically represented in the Tabernacle building that stood behind the church from ca. 1900 until the 1960s. The Tabernacle served as a gymnasium and event space for the African-American high school during this time. High school sports, mainly for boys, became popular in the United States in the early twentieth century as the rise of mandatory schooling, more years of education for students, and gender coeducation brought concerns from some quarters over inattention to boys’ physical needs and the risk of “weakness” among boys, often expressed in eugenic terms by “native” Anglo-Saxons (Ripley 2013; Malina N.d.). Despite the racial overtones of the movement for sports in schools, athletics became fairly universal and African-

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<sup>32</sup> The close association between Asbury Church and the schools through the boarding of teachers nearby, the membership of teachers in Asbury’s congregation, and the use of the Tabernacle as an extension of the school campus on Port Street may have helped to solidify The Hill in the minds of current residents as a historically middle-class neighborhood. Older residents today contrast The Hill as a middle-class African-American neighborhood with The Bottom, along Port Street to the west of The Hill, as a working-class African-American neighborhood. I have not undertaken a complete survey of residence patterns in Easton through time as they concern class among African Americans. However, it is clear from even the most cursory glance at the 1910 census, that The Hill was home to many working-class African-American families at least at that time. Many of these residents in the early twentieth century worked at the factories, canneries, and warehouses that lined the railroad at the eastern boundary of The Hill. Against this historical lack of a clear class geography in residence patterns, Asbury’s association with education, which was a major tool in gaining middle-class employment, may have either helped to establish a middle-class identity around the church and its surrounding houses.

American school communities also embraced athletics. Nevertheless, with fewer resources than the white Easton High School, black students at the old Moton school had no facility on their campus for sports and recreation. Asbury Church stepped in to fill this void with a building known as the Tabernacle. The new Moton school built in 1953 has a gymnasium but students also continued to use the Tabernacle and Asbury Church grounds extensively for athletics.

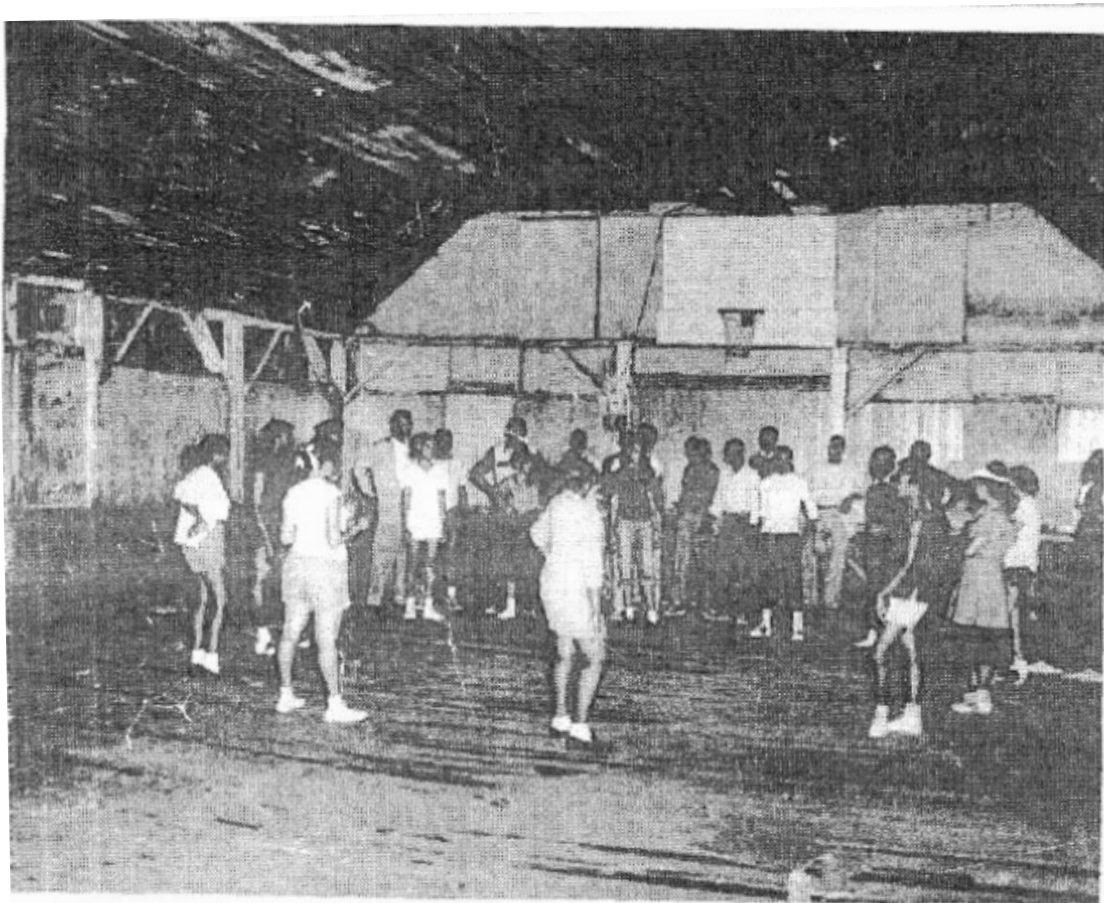
The Tabernacle was a frame structure located on church property behind and slightly to the right (south) of Asbury's church itself. Erected on concrete piers, the building was one story with a gable-front roof containing a vaulted ceiling. The interior space was large enough to hold



**FIGURE 3.3:** Photograph of Asbury's Tabernacle, date uncertain. Historical Society of Talbot County. The dilapidated nature of the building suggests this photograph was taken toward the end of its use. Easton's African-American community continued to use it despite its deteriorating condition. Photograph courtesy of Carlene Phoenix.

a basketball court, though the ceiling was slightly shorter than might have been ideal for the sport and players had to arc their shots lower and straighter to avoid hitting the ceiling. During the excavation in 2016, archaeologists learned from informal conversations with community members stopping by the site that they had also played marbles, horseshoes, and baseball in the yard around the Tabernacle.

Archaeology at the Tabernacle in 2016 suggests that it was constructed in the early twentieth century as school sports gained popularity. The building was fairly rudimentary and



**FIGURE 3.4:** Photograph of a gathering of high-school students in the Asbury Tabernacle, date unknown. Historical Society of Talbot County. Most likely, this was taken on the same occasion as FIGURE 4.3. The basketball hoop is visible in the background, with the low ceiling over it. Photograph courtesy of Carlene Phoenix.

already showed signs of wear by the 1940s. The Moton High School Alumni Association includes a photograph of the Tabernacle, dated 1948, on the history section of their website, along with the comment that, “Located on Higgins Street behind the Asbury M. E. Church, ‘The Tabernacle’ served as the Moton gymnasium. Its dilapidated condition illustrates the inferior facilities provided for the County’s black students. Despite inferior athletic facilities, Moton athletes excelled in competition. Many of the teams won state championships, like the 1946 soccer team” (Moton High School Alumni Association 2017). African Americans thus refused to be dominated by the limited resources available to them under Segregation. Asbury Church, with its deep involvement in education, provided what the school board did not: a place where young black athletes could—and did—excel.

The need and desire for education brought African-American communities like the one in Easton together around a common goal. Adults came together first to volunteer their time to teach in the Sunday schools and then to give their time and money to support the schools when state-provided funding came up short. Churches served as vehicles for these efforts.

Integration of the segregated schools came in 1966–1967 and changed the relationship between the African-American churches and the schools. After *Brown v. Board* in May 1954, Talbot County schools implemented “freedom of choice,” where students could choose to change schools. Very few ever did, however. No white students wanted to attend the black school and only a handful of black students braved isolation, tremendous pressure to perform well, and harassment to attend the white schools. Up until the spring of 1966, the county refused to completely integrate the schools. As Walter Black, then president of the local NAACP chapter, explained in an oral history interview in 2015 with Hill Community Project member Angela Howell, he sent a private letter to the school superintendent on Good Friday 1966

threatening a summer of demonstrations unless the Board of Education announced integration for the 1966–1967 school year. This threat ultimately proved sufficient to make the school board move on the issue and integration began when classes started back up again that fall—grades 1–6 that year and grades 7–12 in fall 1967. By the start of school in fall 1968, the county schools were completely integrated (Walter Black, oral history interview with Angela Howell, 27 July 2015).

Integration and full access to county school facilities meant that Easton’s African-American students no longer needed the Tabernacle at Asbury Church for athletics and school functions. The building, by that time in a fairly advanced state of disrepair, was torn down. Serug Phoenix, who had moved away as a young man, returned to Easton and to his church family at Asbury, in 1968, and recalls that by that time the Tabernacle was gone (personal interview with Serug Phoenix, July 2016). For a time, the site of the Tabernacle became a bottle dump. Archaeologically, the destruction layers from the building’s demolition include large amounts of bottle glass intermingled with asphalt shingles, nails, and the remnants of concrete piers. Today, grass has grown over where the Tabernacle once stood and the congregation uses it as a parking area.

Integration also disrupted the close relationships that students had enjoyed with teachers who lived in their neighborhoods and attended their churches. This shift began with construction of teacher housing opposite new Glenwood Ave. school in the mid-1950s. There was a small migration of African Americans at that time from The Hill to the new neighborhood, including William Fauntleroy, who over the course of his career was a teacher, elementary school principle, supervisor of the “colored” schools, and principle of Moton and Easton High Schools (Walter Black, oral history interview with Angela Howell, 2014; Eric Dashiell, oral history

interview with Yvonne Freeman, 27 July 2015; Moton High School Alumni Association 2017). However, even after the move, some teachers still came up on The Hill to attend Asbury and the church's tabernacle had continued to serve the school as an auxiliary facility (Eric Daschiell oral history interview, with Yvonne Freeman, 27 July 2015). While community relationships survived the move to Glenwood Avenue, Integration proved more detrimental to them.

Integration meant that students often had teachers who were not members of the same communities outside of school. It also placed the body of African-American students into the larger body of white students, resulting in larger schools where personal, individual relationships with teachers became more difficult to maintain. Eric Dashiell lived through Integration under the "freedom of choice" system in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He describes the deterioration of the teacher-community network this way: "One of the downsides of Integration was that, at Moton, if you had potential and you weren't doing well, the teachers might take you home. They might go to your parents' house and say, 'Look, we—we need to work with this kid—' whereas you're just a number in—at Easton High. They're not about to give you that kind of attention" (Eric Dashiell, oral history interview with Yvonne Freeman, 27 July 2015). Ultimately, with few of their teachers living in their neighborhoods and attending their churches, it became easier for students to get lost in the crowd.

### Diversity in Worship Practice

Archaeologists made a curious discovery during excavation at the Tabernacle: beneath the many broken bottles dumped there following the building's destruction, two bottles appeared to have been embedded vertically on the east side of the chimney. Although the bottles had been sheared off at the shoulder during the destruction episode, the necks remained buried several

inches in the buried topsoil of the Tabernacle's occupation period. The two bottles were spaced evenly along the east wall of the chimney base. The position and orientation of these two bottles is similar to African-American spiritual practices using bottled documents elsewhere. This presents a conundrum because African Methodist ministers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were attempting to move their congregations away from African-derived religious practices and toward a more mainstream, modern, Western, or Christian—depending on one's perspective—form of worship. If they really do relate to spiritual practices, these bottles reflect a note of dissonance in Asbury's congregation over practical modes of worship while, at the same time, confirming the vital importance of education to the congregation.

The tension between desires to fit into American society and to be fully American, on the one hand, and yet to be American in a way that is unique and self-respecting of African heritages and the black historical experience in America, on the other, has shaped much of African-American culture. It became perhaps most famous in the disagreements between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in the early twentieth century on strategies for achieving racial uplift. Within African Methodism in the nineteenth century, this tension manifested as disagreements between church leaders and everyday congregation members and preachers over the definition of "proper" Christian worship. African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne illustrates this tension in his 1888 memoir, where he comments on the singing and praying bands, a regional form of worship particular to the Delmarva peninsula and eastern Maryland:

I have mentioned the "Praying and Singing Bands" elsewhere. The strange delusion that many ignorant but well-meaning people labor under leads me to speak particularly of them. About this time I attended a "bush meeting," where I went to please the pastor whose circuit I was visiting. After the sermon they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request they stopped their

dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies to and fro. This they did for about fifteen minutes. I then went, and taking their leader by the arm requested him to desist and to sit down and sing in a rational manner. I told him also that it was a heathenish way to worship and disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name. In that instance they broke up their ring; but would not sit down, and walked sullenly away. After the sermon in the afternoon, having another opportunity of speaking alone to this young leader of the singing and clapping ring, he said: "Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring." Said I: "You might sing till you fell down dead, and you would fail to convert a single sinner, because nothing but the Spirit of God and the word of God can convert sinners." He replied: "The Spirit of God works upon people in different ways. At camp-meeting there must be a ring here, a ring there, a ring over yonder, or sinners will not get converted." This was his idea, and it is also that of many others. These "Bands" I have had to encounter in many places, and, as I have stated in regard to my early labors in Baltimore, I have been strongly censured because of my efforts to change the mode of worship or modify the extravagances indulged in by the people. In some cases all that I could do was to teach and preach the right, fit, and proper way of serving God. To the most thoughtful and intelligent I usually succeeded in making the "Band" disgusting; but by the ignorant masses, as in the case mentioned, it was regarded as the essence of religion. So much so was this the case that, like this man, they believed no conversion could occur without their agency, nor outside of their own ring could any be a genuine one. Among some of the songs of these "Rings," or "Fist and Heel Worshipers," as they have been called, I find a note of two in my journal, which were used in the instance mentioned. As will be seen, they consisted chiefly of what are known as "corn-field ditties:"

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;  
If God won't have us, the devil must.  
I was way over there where the coffin fell;  
I heard that sinner as he screamed in hell.

To indulge in such songs from eight to ten and half-past ten at night was the chief employment of these "Bands." Prayer was only a secondary thing, and this was rude and extravagant to the last degree. The man who had the most powerful pair of lungs was the one who made the best prayer, and he could be heard a square off. He who could sing loudest and longest led the "Band," having his loins girded and a handkerchief in hand with which he kept time, while his feet resounded on the floor like the drumsticks of a bass drum. In some places it was the custom to begin these dances after every night service and keep it up till midnight, sometimes singing and dancing alternately--a short prayer and a long dance. Some one has even called it the "Voodoo Dance." I have remonstrated with a number of pastors for permitting these practices, which vary somewhat in different localities, but have been invariably met with the response that he could not succeed in restraining them, and an attempt to compel them to cease would simply drive them away from our Church. I suppose that with the most stupid and



headstrong it is an incurable religious disease, but it is with me a question whether it would not be better to let such people go out of the Church than remain in it to perpetuate their evil practice and thus do two things: disgrace the Christian name and corrupt others. Any one who knows human nature must infer the result after such midnight practices to be that the day after they are unfit for labor, and that at the end of the dance their exhaustion would render them an easy prey to Satan. These meetings must always be more damaging physically, morally, and religiously than beneficial. How needful it is to have an intelligent ministry to teach these people who hold to this ignorant mode of worship the true method of serving God. And my observations lead me to the conclusion that we need more than an intelligent ministry to cure this religious fanaticism. We need a host of Christian reformers like St. Paul, who will not only speak against these evils, but who will also resist them, even if excommunication be necessary. The time is at hand when the ministry of the A. M. E. Church must drive out this heathenish mode of worship or drive out all the intelligence, refinement, and practical Christians who may be in her bosom.

So far from being in harmony with the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, it antagonizes his holy religion. And what is most deplorable, some of our most popular and powerful preachers labor systematically to perpetuate this fanaticism. Such preachers never rest till they create an excitement that consists in shouting, jumping, and dancing. I say systematically do they preach to produce such results, and just as systematically do they avoid the trial of persons accused of swindling, drunkenness, embezzling, and the different forms of adultery. I deliberately record that which I know, and am prepared if necessary to prove.

To these sensational and recreant preachers I recommend the careful and prayerful study of the text: "To the unknown God, whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts xvii. 23.) The preachers against whom I make this record are intensely religious, but grossly immoral. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Payne 1888:253–257).

Despite challenges from church leadership, singing and praying bands in eastern Maryland and in Delaware continued to hold their distinct form of worship through the twentieth century and today. Their energetic worship remains a powerful and engaging form of religious expression. The singing and praying bands from the nineteenth century to the present include African-American members of both the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal (United Methodist, from 1968 onward) Church. The Singing and Praying Bands of Maryland and Delaware still organizes this type of worship today (Singing and Praying Bands of

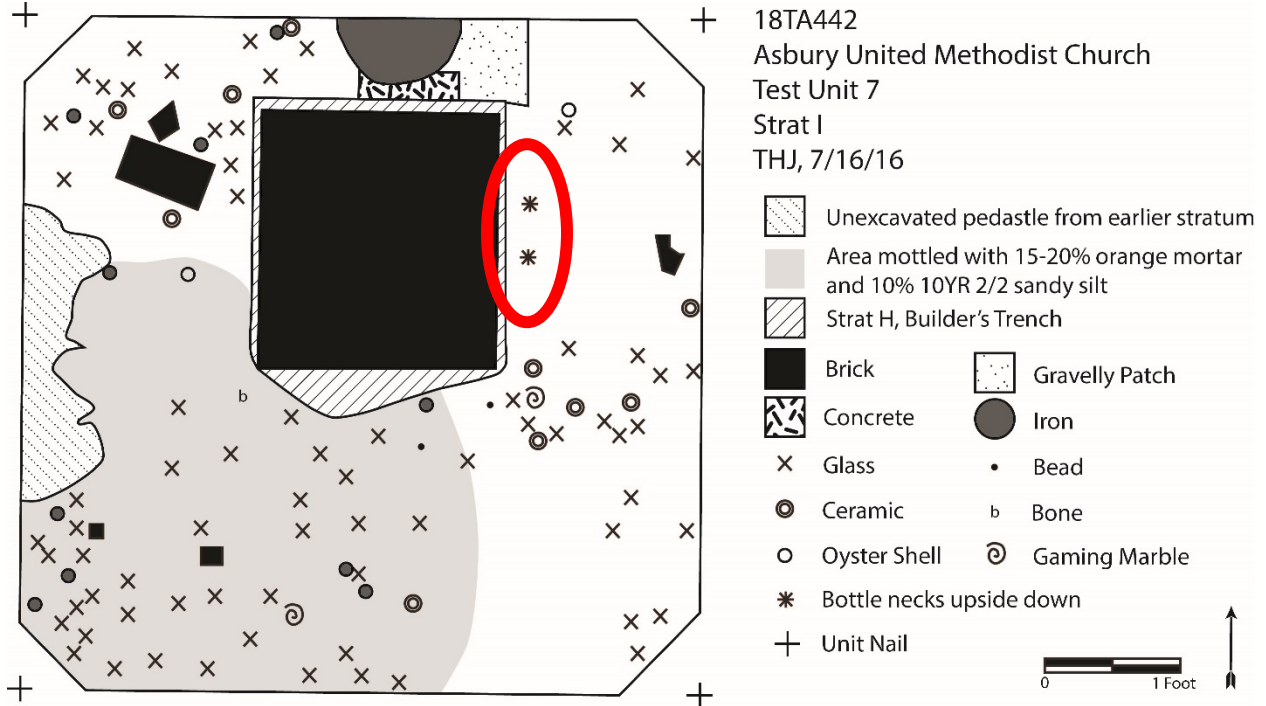
Maryland and Delaware 2018) and has been recognized by the Smithsonian as a national treasure (Murphy 2014).

Leaders in both the African Methodist Episcopal and the Methodist Episcopal Church often found such forms of worship to be contrary to their established notions of what Christianity should look like. African-American church leaders came from the ranks of the free African-American middle classes and had different norms and aesthetics than rural and working-class members of the same denominations. Daniel Payne himself was of mixed black, native, and English ancestry and was born in 1811 into a prominent family among the elite of free African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, where he also received an education (Payne 1888:11–13). Elite free blacks in slaveowning South Carolina typically emulated their white neighbors' lifestyles, even to the extent of owning slaves, which secured their status in a slaveholding society and conveyed to white folks that they were part of, not a threat to, that society (Meyers 2011). Within this context, Payne's condemnation of a powerful and popular form of worship within his church can be seen at least partly as a reaction based in the class and racial realities of his upbringing. Given the constant threats to black churches from white society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—indeed, through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as well, particularly from white supremacists—conforming to more mainstream, European forms of worship may also have been a means for church leaders of legitimizing the church and attracting broader white acceptance. This is not to say that leaders like Payne did not deeply believe that worship of certain types was inappropriate, but it offers some insight into influences on their convictions.

To everyday church members and preachers, however, African-derived, supposedly pagan practices were an entirely Christian form of worship that needed no legitimization. They

were a communal, established, traditional form of Christian expression with deep roots that formed, for practitioners, the only justification needed. Indeed, there was deeply-seated precedent for forms of Christian expression derived from Africa (Leone et al. 2018). African Americans, both enslaved and free, therefore engaged in a variety of religious expressions that included pre-Christian spiritual beliefs and practices that they interpreted within a Christian framework. In this regard, African Americans are little different from European Americans whose traditional beliefs in witchcraft and pagan heritage influenced their expressions of Christianity. For Euro-American examples, one need look only as far as the Christmas tree. Despite objections from ministers, regular members of Christian churches of many denominations have sustained traditional vernacular practices in their worship. It is within this context that I approach the bottles buried at the Tabernacle.

When the Tabernacle was standing, it had a stove at its southeast corner. The chimney for this stove was made of brick and its width was the length of two bricks. The base of this chimney remained intact below-ground when the building was razed. On the eastern side of this chimney base, archaeologists found two bottles buried upside-down. These were twentieth-century machine-made bottles with screw tops. Neither was intact and there was little to distinguish them from the other bottle fragments that lay strewn amid the nails, concrete chunks, and roofing shingles of the building destruction layer. Except that the necks of these two bottles were buried several inches into the soil surrounding the chimney base and stood perfectly vertical, evenly spaced along the east wall of the chimney. When artifacts are deposited along with the destruction of a building, they can end up at odd angles. However, they are rarely pressed down into the soil underneath in any significant way such that they have to be dug out. These bottles were placed deliberately.



**Figure 3.5:** Location of buried bottles. This plan view of the opening of the archaeological context in which the upturned buried bottle necks were found shows their location along the east wall of the chimney foundation. All artifacts in this stratum were piece-plotted and, although there are many other fragments of bottle glass in this context, none were buried in the same way as these two bottle necks.

Within traditional African and African-American spiritual practices, bottles are associated with containment (Thompson 1998:45). Throughout eastern Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia in the twentieth century, folklorist Robert Farris Thompson noted the use of bottles and jugs, usually right-side up, around the entryway of a house to trap and drive away evil (Thompson 1998:57). In Mississippi and Alabama, colorful bottle trees also serve a protective action: as one woman familiar with the tradition explains, “evil ‘was attracted to bright colors and the first thing you know they are trapped inside the bottles and can’t get outside”” (quoted in Thompson 1998:58). The glitter of shiny, uncolored bottles can also attract and frighten away

evil (Thompson 1998:59). Bottles have been found at royal burial sites in the Kongo and also at prestigious burials in the American South, where they are sometimes used to line graves and designate or recreate the enclosure within which the monarch and their power reside, or *luumbu* (Thompson and Cornet 1981:41,182–185,197). These bottles are often upside-down. The *luumbu* acts as a protective barrier in Kongo tradition, where it “conceptually shields the dead person from outside forces and protects the living from the latter’s own power-emanations” (Thompson and Cornet 1981:194). The practice also spread beyond burials to yards, contributing to the protection of domestic spaces, as well as funerary ones (Thompson and Cornet 1981:195–197). Therefore, inverted bottles are used in a variety of ways throughout Kongo spirit traditions and African-American traditions influenced by this Kongolese heritage and generally are associated with protection from evil. Entryways to dwellings, including chimneys, are particularly vulnerable places that must be protected against evil, according to folk traditions throughout both Europe and West and Central Africa from the medieval period into the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

Archaeological examples of spiritual deposits in African-American spaces abound in the Chesapeake region. Many of these have been documented over the years by the Archaeology in Annapolis project and others by a volume produced by the Maryland Historical Trust in 2019

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<sup>33</sup> These traditions became manifest in physical rituals such as carving apotropaic symbols into the wooden mantles of chimneys in Knole House, a seventeenth-century mansion in Kent, England (Wright 2015). In England, beliefs in witches and actions to circumvent them “were not only not marginal but actively encouraged by both traditional church practices and a Neoplatonic conception of the potency of words, incantations, and charms in physical and spiritual matters” (Angus 2018:55). In 1897, the importance of entryways played a principle role in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, where Lucy Westenra must invite Dracula into the house before he can cross the threshold—thereafter, the protagonists must defend all openings, including the fireplace, with garlic against his re-entry (Stoker 1897:133). Since Stoker knew barely anything of Romanian vampire beliefs at the time of writing (Light 2008:10), his association of the means by which evil may enter a house derive more from British understandings of witchcraft than from the cultural setting into which he placed his plot. Western beliefs regarding chimneys as access points for the supernatural persist even today in the person of Santa Claus, whose magical visits down chimneys to leave gifts draw on several centuries of precedent (Wright 2015).

(Cofield 2019a). Chimneys, entryways, and bottles feature prominently in these archaeological deposits. In the early 2000s, workers fixing the eighteenth-century greenhouse hypocaust furnace and flue at Wye House Plantation in Talbot County, Maryland, uncovered a large stone pestle that had been bricked into the fireplace. A pestle was also discovered at the nearby hothouse in 2012 (Pruitt 2013:12,24). In 2015, I worked with the Archaeology in Annapolis team on the site of a postbellum African-American tenant farmhouse at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland. We found several bottles amid the building's chimneyfall. Based on their location in the middle of the pile of fallen bricks, it appeared that the bottles had been concealed within the chimney. Other archaeological projects have also turned up evidence of similar deposits. Smith's St. Leonard Plantation (ca. 1711–1754) in Calvert County, Maryland, produced a seventeenth-century English Commonwealth coin, many decades old by the time of its deposition, in the plowzone above the chimney hearth (Cofield 2019b).

Many of these same sites also had spiritual objects placed in other entryways. The Wye House greenhouse had a quarter attached to the rear of the building, where the enslaved workers who kept the fire going through the winter lived. Immediately outside the entrance to that quarter, archaeologists found a button, prehistoric white quartzite spear point facing outward toward the burial ground for the Lloyd family, who owned the plantation (Blair et al. 2009:168). The tenant cabin at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center also produced a white river cobble beneath the doorway. At Smith's St. Leonard Plantation, archaeologists recovered half a French coin folded over and placed deep in a post feature at the entrance to a storehouse cellar (Cofield 2019b). In addition, archaeologists working at Mount Clare Plantation in Baltimore, Maryland, recovered a large crystal buried under the doorway to the kitchen (Schiszik 2019).

These are just a few examples from the Chesapeake that demonstrate a widespread pattern of placing objects of significance in doorways and chimneys to control the supernatural.

Because there is no perfect, direct analog between the two bottles upside-down along the east wall of the Tabernacle's chimney and known, precedent Old-World spiritual practices, it is not possible to say exactly what the intent was of the person who placed them there. The placement seems intentional. It is likely connected to protection of the building and its occupants. While admittedly, tacking into the realm of conjecture, it seems possible that the bottles may have been intended to sanctify and to protect the Tabernacle as a space important to the community, given its use for educational, recreational, and social purposes by the neighborhood children.

By the time of the Tabernacle's construction at the beginning of the twentieth century, several generations of ministers in both the M.E. and A.M.E. churches had discouraged the superstitions and vernacular practices that they viewed as antithetical to pure Christian worship. Yet, if the bottles at the Tabernacle's chimney really do indicate the kind of practice that they seem to, it would appear that at least someone of the congregation or nearby community saw fit to draw on those earlier traditions for the consecration of the building and the role it played in the community.

Regardless of the disagreements within congregations like Asbury over the proper form of worship, Asbury's congregation remained united in their commitment to education. If these bottles really do represent part of the North American spiritual traditions that African Americans developed in Maryland, and which are evidenced by some of the archaeological sites above, then those practices were employed by someone in the congregation in order to protect the Tabernacle

from evil and to consecrate it and the important mission of education that the building served and represented.

Religious communities are rarely homogenous. When doctrine and practice become too rigidly enforced across diverse groups with diverse needs, religions and denominations within them tend to splinter and break apart. This is precisely what happened to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the nineteenth century, producing the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, Wesleyan Church, Free Methodist Church. Easton's African-American community became separated by congregational lines in antebellum period but it never completely fractured. Both churches continued to work together. During work on The Hill, Historic Easton's membership has included representatives from both churches. Shared goals of freedom of religious expression, the desire for spiritual camaraderie, and education have helped to ensure that diversity does not mean division within African-Americans in Easton.



## Chapter 4

### Collective Memory and a Military Pathway to Citizenship

Perhaps the most famous story from Reconstruction in Talbot County, Maryland, is that of the founding of Unionville by eighteen African-American veterans of the Civil War and their families (Guy 2004; Hopkinson 2017). Many African Americans, both free and enslaved, left Talbot County to join the United States Colored Troops during the war and eighteen black veterans returned to Talbot to found the town of Unionville after their service ended. The town's founding and history are documented in Bernard Demczuk's (2008) dissertation. In 1870, amid voter intimidation and violence against newly-enfranchised black men in Talbot County, the veterans from Unionville donned their army uniforms, put their rifles on their shoulders, and marched in column into the county seat at Easton as a show of material and symbolic force to protect their citizenship. The march of the Unionville veterans demonstrates quite clearly the symbolism that military service took on in African-American thought by the middle part of the nineteenth century and the connection between service and citizenship that African Americans forged as part of their freedom struggle. They attached new significance to the uniform and its component parts and they enacted this meaning in defense of their humanity, freedom, and citizenship.

Benjamin Skolnik (2017) has demonstrated the significance of military material culture, especially uniform buttons, to this particular path in African-Americans' drive for citizenship by connecting army uniform buttons excavated at Wye House Plantation, as well as in Easton and elsewhere, with Frederick Douglass' contemporary rhetoric. Douglass both deconstructed American patriotic ideology—to show how celebrations of freedom and equality as a fait accompli papered over existing atrocities of his time against those values (Douglass 2013

[1852])—and also inhabited those ideals to turn the same ideology around and make it work for African Americans. Skolnik illustrates how Douglass and the soldiers who joined the U.S. Colored Troops, whose ranks the abolitionist labored to create and to fill, installed this ideological turnaround into the physical artifact of the uniform and the rifle. Most important to the interpretation of the meaning of military artifacts to the generation of African Americans who fought in the Civil War is a statement Douglass made while recruiting for the U.S. Colored Troops in 1863:

Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters US, let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States (Douglass 1863, quoted in Skolnik 2017:220).

Because Douglass speaks directly about the uniform and its ideological symbolism in the struggle for citizenship, these ideological connections enable Skolnik to demonstrate the full ideological power of the 1870 march from Unionville to Easton. As Skolnik illustrates, they also bear directly on what we as archaeologists are to make of the Civil War buttons we have recovered from archaeological contexts in Talbot County and throughout Eastern Maryland.

Skolnik's perspective on Douglass and on the black soldiers and veterans who served in the Civil War presents a powerful analysis. And his singular focus on Douglass as a critical theorist and a lens to interpret these military artifacts was appropriate to the volume in which that analysis appeared—a volume of which I was also a part and which was dedicated to exploring transatlantic literary and archaeological connections through Douglass' writings. However, I would suggest that none of the ideological turn that Douglass made by reinterpreting American patriotism in support of the African-American freedom struggle and none of the infusing of that meaning into the army uniform, whose fragments we as archaeologists occasionally have found, would have been possible without a broader social and cultural context in which African

Americans, both nationally and in local communities, worked collectively to claim patriotism for themselves. As towering and influential a figure as Douglass was, he was also a part of a larger activist community established by free African Americans in the years before he began his career of public speaking. And as pivotal were the contributions of the men who fought and sometimes died for their citizenship rights, African-American women and children also played key roles in attaching meaning to service. By examining the militaria from The Hill neighborhood that archaeologists have recovered at several sites, it becomes possible to see a cross-section of a community sharing these ideological meanings from the Civil War through the generations that served in the Indian wars, the Philippines, and both world wars. These social contexts created a semiotic community—a collective symbolic conversation that helped to carry out in practice across the whole community of family, friends, and neighbors the ideological struggle for citizenship that Douglass so eloquently voiced.

African-American activists first crafted the connection between U.S. military service and citizenship in the 1850s. The first generations of African-American veterans from the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 had mainly devoted themselves inward, to their communities, their churches, their families, and fraternal organizations. In the 1850s, their descendants began to claim a heritage of military service as part of the argument for African-American citizenship: by serving the country's armed forces and risking, sometimes sacrificing, their lives for the country, they deserved the full rights accorded to citizens in the republic (Bethel 1999:1–6,81–82).

In the first third of the nineteenth century, free African Americans were intentionally excluded from national identity, which caused them to look both outward to the international stage and inward to their own local communities. Mainstream [white] celebrations of the 4<sup>th</sup> of

July discouraged black participation, excluding both materially and symbolically this segment of the nation. On some occasions, inebriated whites could actually turn violently on people of color who showed their faces. As a result, black folks instead celebrated January 1<sup>st</sup>, anniversary of both Jean-Jacques Dessalines' declaration of Haitian independence in 1804 and the U.S. prohibition on the slave trade in 1808 (Bethel 1999:6). Focus on these two events became central to African-American identity in 1800-1835, leading to a fundamentally international perspective (Bethel 1999:81). Meanwhile, in 1800-1835, black Revolutionary War veterans turned inward, organizing churches, schools, and mutual aid societies (Bethel 1999:82). However, the generations that came up behind these veterans laid more and more emphasis on their Americanness and, as they countered the Colonization Society's efforts to oust them from their homeland, they held the United States up to its own values.

Nineteenth-century African-American leaders developed a critical patriotism in the face of strong pressure in the antebellum period from the American Colonization Society and the movement to colonize free African Americans in Liberia. The colonization movement had begun in the late eighteenth century when some free people of color, only one or two generations removed from Africa or they, themselves, having been born there, sought to return across the sea. At that time, many free people of African descent in the United States saw themselves as African. Even then, however, many free Africans born on this side of the Atlantic already considered themselves Americans and had no desire to leave the only home they had ever known. For example, the free black community of Rhode Island was much more interested in colonization than that of Philadelphia (Sterling 1998 [1973]:4–12). Paul Cuffe, a mixed African and Wampanoag merchant and ship owner based in Rhode Island, made a handful of crossings to Sierra Leone between 1810 and 1816. However, with his death the following year, the initial

African-led colonization movement died out (Sterling 1998 [1973]:16–28). By the 1820s, the movement had been reignited, this time under white leadership. Many leading white people of the period joined or supported the American Colonization Society and its efforts to transport free Americans of color to a colony in Liberia. Some were well-intentioned—Wasn't that where black folks wanted to go? Others sought to safeguard slavery against the alternative that free black folks demonstrated by their very existence—removing this population, they thought, would prevent slaves from aspiring to be free. For their part, nineteenth-century African Americans, almost all of whom, after the 1808 federal ban on international slave trade, had been born in this country, tended to identify the United States as home. Already by 1800, Africa was becoming for them a mythological homeland of which many had no direct knowledge (Bethel 1999:82). Although some families and individuals did desire to go to Africa and others discussed establishing a free colony in Canada, for the most part they rejected efforts to remove them from their home, sometimes vehemently (Walker 1830b:40–88; American Society of Free Persons of Colour 1831:10; Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color 1832). As a result, when the government made a census of the free black people living in Talbot County in 1832, with a column to indicate those willing to go to Liberia, not a single mark was made in that column (Talbot County Court 1832).<sup>34</sup> Though some free African Americans did go to Liberia in the nineteenth century, generation after generation, African Americans identified less with Africa and more with America. And they were determined to be Americans.

African Americans responded to Colonization with a particular, critical form of patriotism. In his fiery *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* of 1829, David Walker

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<sup>34</sup> The Colonization scheme actually united free blacks in their opposition to it in a way they had not been before. Scarcely a month after the American Colonization Society was organized, the first national meeting of free blacks was held in Philadelphia (Sweet 1976:40). Marylanders were particularly active against colonization, to the point of boarding ships and pleading with or even attacking would-be black colonists in 1831 and '33 (Sweet 1976:46).

(1830) treads intentionally and explicitly in the path of the Declaration of Independence, which he reproduces in its entirety in his conclusion. He voices the grievances of people of color in the United States and throughout the world: slavery, lack of education, the twisting of Christianity, and the colonization scheme. For Walker, these grievances justify action toward self-governance:

“When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right it is their duty to throw off such government, and to produce new guards for their future security.” See your Declaration Americans!!!...I ask you candidly, was your sufferings under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you? (Walker 1830b:85–86).

Walker spoke to “you [white Americans]” in the second person, but his use of American history and rhetoric challenged the exclusion of African Americans from their own country, to which he maintained a claim and right, quoting A.M.E. bishop Richard Allen’s indictment of the Colonization movement in the pages of *Freedom’s Journal*:

“Can we not discern the project of sending the free people of colour away from their county? Is it not for the interest of the slave-holders to select the free people of colour out of the different states, and send them to Liberia? Will it not make their slaves uneasy to see free men of colour enjoying liberty?...I have no doubt that there are many good men who do not see as I do, and who are for sending us to Liberia; but they have not duly considered the subject—they are not men of colour—This land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now out mother country, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free” (Richard Allen, quoted in Walker 1830b:64–65).

By answering the forces of slavery, denial of citizenship rights to free people of color, and “the colonization scheme” with American ideals, Walker’s *Appeal* foreshadowed much of the rhetoric to come.

In 1858, William Cooper Nell, an active antislavery advocate and arguably the first African-American historian, organized a festival in Boston commemorating the death of Crispus

Attucks and protesting *Dred Scott*. The event thus addressed the current issues facing free people of color in America while also commemorating the sacrifices that their forebears had made to make the nation possible. Nell's father was a veteran of the Revolution, but Nell sought to transcend family history and bind people together to oppose slavery and try to make the U.S. fulfill its promise of liberty for all (Bethel 1999:1–5).

Free African Americans were therefore patriotic at the same time as they were critical. Rhetoric like that of Walker and Nell formed a broad pattern of reinterpreting the values of the society in which they lived. As historian Leonard Sweet writes, “Black leaders knew who they were. They were black, they were Americans, and they were committed to the cause of emancipation, elevation, and equality—a cause that would purify American ideals and redeem America’s destiny as a beacon to the oppressed” (Sweet 1976:4). In defying colonization and its logic, black writers went over American history and pointed out black contributions, especially during the Revolutionary War. Because the Revolution was generally used by historians to construct the “God’s chosen people” rhetoric of nationalism, their insertion gave them ground to say, as did William J. Watkins in 1855, “Why should you be a chosen people more than me?” (quoted in Sweet 1976:45). Douglass joined this conversation. In 1849, he told a white audience in Boston that, “if it were in the tradition of American history for a people to revolt against a three-penny tea tax, it should be equally welcome in the American tradition if ‘the sable arms which had been engaged in beautifying and adorning the South were engaged in spreading death and devastation there’” (Sweet 1976:47). Free African Americans “championed the values of antebellum society in ways that argued for their own freedom and equality, and they constructed interpretations of current and historical events that served their distinct needs.” They fought against all the ways in which they were misrepresented. “In instance after instance, African

Americans in public appropriated the ideas of antebellum society, only to reformulate hostile notions into potent sources of empowerment and uplift” (Rael 2002:2–3). So, Douglass worked well within an established tradition of holding America accountable to her ideals. His main contribution in his recruiting efforts was to attach the patriotic challenge in black rhetoric to the physical artifacts of the uniform and the weapon that black soldiers carried. In doing so, he gave a platform and a voice to the common soldier. Though many of the African-American masses were illiterate, they spoke loudly and proudly through these symbols and through their actions on the battlefield. At home, participation in curating the memory and meaning of these acts of valor cut across the demographics of African-American communities. Together, men, women, and children worked the narrative of citizenship through service into everyday life. They left behind them the traces of this work in the archaeological record.

### John Green’s Buttons

The first military artifacts we encountered in Easton were two uniform buttons that were recovered in 2012, the first summer of archaeological excavations on The Hill, at a house first inhabited in 1879 by John and Eliza Green. John Green had been a soldier in the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the United States Colored Infantry, which was organized in 1864 across the Chesapeake Bay in Benedict, Maryland (USDI 1890:2; Dyer1908:249).<sup>35</sup> Green most likely took part in the Battle of the Crater at the siege of Petersburg, as well as the march into the Carolinas (Wikipedia 2020). After the war, John and Eliza Green had settled in Easton at 323 South Street, where they

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<sup>35</sup> Genealogist Lyndra Marshall’s research for The Hill Community Project places John Green in the 7th Regiment of Infantry, not the 30th (personal communication June 19, 2015). I have not yet been able to clear up this discrepancy in the records.



took up residence in the newly-built house that they first rented and then bought (Parker 2002). The house eventually became known in the community as the Buffalo Soldier Home because of a connection with later residents. John Green died about 1890 or 1895 (USDI 1890:2; Lyndra Marshall, personal communication June 19, 2015). After her husband's death, Eliza remarried widower John Dobson and moved in with him on Dover Street, renting out the house on South Street. After Dobson's death, Eliza moved back to the South Street house and lived there until she passed in 1929. Her nephew, then living in Chicago, sold the house to Malcar (or Malachi)



**Figure 4.1:** U.S. Army uniform buttons excavated at 323 South Street in 2012. Both of these buttons feature the eagle.

and Elizabeth Gardner in 1930. The Gardners were relatives of William Gardner, who served in the United States Army from 1886 to 1908 (Parker N.d. [2002]; Parker 2002). The house therefore has a double connection with African-American military service.

Skolnik estimates that at least one of the two buttons (Figure 4.1a) dates to 1854–1883 and was intended for an officer’s uniform (Skolnik 2017:228). Based on what we initially knew about the house’s inhabitants, Skolnik has attributed these uniform buttons to the service of William Gardner, the later Buffalo Soldier. It was some years before genealogist Lyndra Marshall of The Hill Community Project uncovered the details of Green’s earlier service and Gardner seemed the natural fit in our early assessments (Lyndra Marshall, personal communication June 19, 2015). It is still possible that the buttons belonged to him; after all, the army had a great many buttons of this design on-hand when it phased them out in 1883 (McChristian 2007:53) and may well have still used them for the African-American troops as a cost-saving measure indicative of the lower value placed in the black soldier when Gardner enlisted in 1886. However, given that William Gardner himself never lived at the home on South Street and that Green’s service during the Civil War falls directly within the period of active use of buttons of this design, it seems perhaps more likely that the buttons came from Green’s uniform.<sup>36</sup>

The reassignment of these buttons’ origin from Gardner to Green introduces some new layers of meaning to these small finds. Skolnik’s (2017) interpretation rightly describes, through Douglass’ rhetoric, the vital significance of uniform pieces to the development of military service as an element of the struggle for citizenship. However, the years and the miles between John Green’s mustering out of the army in 1865 and his and Eliza’s taking up residence at this

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<sup>36</sup> Aside from the question of dating, the issue of this being an officer’s button remains unresolved. The second button may not have been an officer’s button.

site some fifteen years later add depth to the significance of these artifacts. When viewed in connection with Gardner, who did not live at the site, the buttons are meaningful in terms of his service in the American West and the Philippines, as well as in terms of family heirlooms kept safe through the 1920s and '30s. However, when viewed in connection with John and Eliza Green, the meaning of these buttons becomes anchored to this house and the couple's life there in the 1870s and '80s. These uniform buttons were recovered in the yard around the house, one from the rear yard and one from the side yard in a narrow strip of ground between the house and the one next-door. These proveniences suggest social practices and a memory of service that was active in the post-Civil-War world in which the Greens lived.

In 1880, John Green worked as a hod carrier. He may well have helped to build the 1876 brick church at Asbury, which rises up one block behind the house in which he and Eliza lived. Eliza, for her part, kept house. Her adult daughter from a previous partner, Laura Skinner, also lived with the couple and worked as a chambermaid (USDI 1880:32). The family's solid working-class status did not afford them much luxury. But the deposition of the buttons in the yard indicates that John Green remembered his service with pride. His uniform did not remain in a box; but he wore it out and about, perhaps to much the same effect as his contemporaries in Unionville in the resistance to black voter suppression in the period. Eliza, among her household work, would have laundered her husband's uniform and kept it clean and tidy. It is probably during some episode of laundering in the yard outside the house that the buttons fell off and joined the archaeological record.

Eliza Green's role in this story of military service, sacrifice, and remembrance shows that women played equal parts with men as custodians of the meaning of military service. African-American women in the nineteenth century typically took on work outside or inside the home to

support their families. Although Eliza Green kept house and did not work formally outside her home, she may well have supplemented her husband's work as a hod carrier and her daughter's work as a domestic servant by taking in small work here and there. Laundry was a common occupation of women at home at that time, a constant need that they met for their own families and that they could easily extend to take on for others as well.<sup>37</sup> This kind of work often brought women together. It is not hard to imagine Eliza Green washing her husband's uniform amongst other clothes in the company of close friends. What a subject for conversation the uniform must then have made. These sorts of conversations among women while performing tasks that blurred the boundary between the domestic and the public spheres placed women in the center of the social lives of their communities and at the center of the shaping and reshaping of collective culture and values. In this way, Eliza's laundering of her husband's uniform played just as great a role in establishing and maintaining the uniform's significance in the postbellum world as did his wearing it. The couple worked together to sustain the memory of John's service and to recall that service as part of their claim on citizenship.

### William Gardner's Discharge Papers

In addition to spouses, other family members also shared in the commemoration on The Hill of African-American military service. Malcar and Elizabeth Gardner bought the house at 323 South Street from Eliza Dobson's nephew in 1930 and brought with them, when they moved

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<sup>37</sup> The informal economy of doing laundry for others does introduce a possibility that one or both of the buttons may have belonged to someone other than the site's residents. Though the second, less ornate button may well have come from Green's uniform, the introduction of laundry from other households could account for the presence of an officer's button—as could the reuse of buttons. Nevertheless, the symbolic import of these artifacts remains essentially the same.

in, the discharge papers of one Sergeant William Gardner, a relative of theirs. According to his discharge papers in 1907, William Gardner entered service in the United States Army in 1886 at the age of 16. He served 22 years in the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, reaching the rank of corporal in 1904 and sergeant in 1906 (Army of the United States 1907). After the discharge recorded in these papers, Gardner immediately renewed his enlistment. He was transferred to Camp McGrath in the Philippines, where he died by suicide on January 16, 1908, at the age of 45 (Parker N.d. [2002]). He was buried in Chapel, near Easton, either at Old Chapel Cemetery or New Chapel Cemetery.<sup>38</sup> There is no marker for him currently in either location, although members of the local African-American community have searched for it (Robert Bailey, personal interview with the author December 18, 2019).

After Malcar and Elizabeth Gardner's passing, the house at 323 South Street stayed in Gardner family hands, passing to Charles Hines, Malcar and Elizabeth's great-grandson, in 1995. Sometime between then and 2002, when Hines transferred the property to the Easton Housing Authority, he discovered the discharge papers in a trunk in the house (Parker 2002). Barney Brooks was Charles Hines' uncle and grandson of Malcar and Elizabeth, describes the discovery in his oral history interview with Angela Howell in 2014 as part of The Hill Community Project.

It is not exactly clear how Sergeant Gardner's papers made their way to the trunk in the house at 323 South Street. The possibility seems unlikely that he visited Easton at any time between his reenlistment in February 1907 and his departure that same year for the Philippines. Given that his body came back to Talbot County, it seems likely that his family also received his

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<sup>38</sup> Kearby Bon Parker's (N.d. [2002]) notes indicate that a burial permit was taken out for William Gardner to be buried at "New Chapel." Barney Brooks, grandson of Malcar and Elizabeth Gardner and a veteran himself who spent 30 years laying memorials at the graves of African-American veterans in Talbot County as a member of the American Legion, suspects, in his April 30, 2014, oral history interview with Angela Howell, that Gardner was buried at a place now called "Old Chapel." Brooks claimed to know the place, though he had only been there once to bury an American Legion comrade.

effects—possibly in the same trunk in which the papers later were found. Malcar and Elizabeth Gardner probably brought them to South Street in 1930. There they stayed as family mementos, safely guarded and well-preserved through the years, helping to carry down through the family’s later generations the knowledge of this Buffalo Soldier’s service.

Just as Malcar and Elizabeth Gardner safeguarded their family’s military service memory, their grandson Barney Brooks has carried on that tradition. Brooks, born on The Hill on South Lane in 1929, joined the United States Army after high school and served in Missouri two years before returning to marry and settle on The Hill. Brooks notes that Easton had quite a few African-American veterans from the Civil War, six of whom are buried at Richardson Cemetery. As an American Legion member, Barney Brooks places flags on the veterans’ graves every Memorial Day. He counts 86 men and 1 woman in total in Easton’s Richardson Cemetery alone from World War II. Brooks took over the job of placing flags from Robert Poney, then the bugler for the Blake Blackstone chapter of the American Legion in Easton. Brooks describes the duty of commemorating African-American veterans and their resting places as a way of maintaining racial equality: “You look at all the white cemeteries, they...remember the veterans that are buried there. And there’s nothing wrong with us remembering them in our cemetery” (oral history interview by Angela Howell, April 30, 2014). Graves in cemeteries are in some manners much like discharge papers stashed away in a trunk or some book for safekeeping. Family members may not visit the graves or take out the records every day, but these places and artifacts serve as repositories of memory and meaning in the afterlife of military service through the generations as African Americans worked toward full citizenship in the United States.

## A Civil War Buckle at Bethel

Sometimes, buried remains of military service and conflict are not remembered and are lost to time. But the significance of their burial lives on in the life of the community as time passes overhead on the surface of the ground. This is the case at the site of Bethel A.M.E. Church. During excavation of a house on the Bethel Church site in 2015, archaeologists recovered a belt buckle or cartridge box plate. The plate was made of brass and was heavily corroded, but the faint, raised outline of the Maryland state seal remained on its front surface.

The plate belongs to a belt buckle or cartridge box made for the Maryland militia before the Civil War. Both belt buckles and cartridge-box plates were struck from the same mold. The rear of the molded brass plate was made of lead and would have featured two knobs and a hook for belt buckles, or two small loops for cartridge-box plates. Without the intact lead backing, it is not possible to tell which type of uniform hardware archaeologists recovered at the site in Easton. Buckles and cartridge plates like this one were made for the Maryland militia during the antebellum period, before the Civil War. The one found at the Bethel site was ovular, following the federal regulations from 1839. Beginning in 1851, new regulations called for belt buckles to be rectangular, but cartridge box plates remained ovular (Ridgeway n.d.).

The militias in Maryland and other states before the Civil War acted as organizations somewhere between social clubs, law enforcement, and paramilitary units. However imperfectly effective they may have been, they served to enforce the systems of social and legal order, including those that maintained slavery and limited the freedoms of free African Americans. Although Maryland nominally required that all adult white males were eligible for militia service, which might be demanded in times of external and internal threat, apathy led in the early



a.



b.

**Figure 4.2:** Maryland militia buckle or cartridge box plate. a. is the version recovered at the Bethel A.M.E. Church site; b. is a well-preserved version of a similar plate, image courtesy of Harry Ridgeway (Ridgeway N.d.).



nineteenth century to a general decline in mandatory militias in the United States. By the 1830s, they were replaced, primarily in urban areas, by private, volunteer militia companies. Some of these were social outlets for the leisured wealthy classes and others were ethnically-based groups for maintaining order in particular neighborhoods. Aside from socializing, drinking, and target shooting, antebellum militias served chiefly to put down mob riots when property was at risk. But the militias typically were more likely to intervene if the rioters were black or immigrants than if these groups were the targets of disorder (Reinders 1977:83–91). In slave states, militias also complemented slave patrols as enforcement mechanisms for the system of slavery by deterring and responding to revolts and potential revolts (Reinders 1977:89–90; Reichel 1988; Bogus 1998:322–375). Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, many Maryland militiamen defected en masse to the Confederate army. They took their uniforms with them. Emerson Gaylord of Chicopee, Massachusetts, who had contracted to produce buckles for the Maryland militia, continued to supply them into 1861 until the federal government intervened to halt his shipments to the Southern states (Graf 2006:67). Buckles and cartridge boxes featuring these plates have been found at several battlefields where these Maryland regiments of the Confederate army fought, including those that were part of the 1862 Peninsular campaign (Ridgeway n.d.).

Given the Confederate associations of such militia uniform hardware, the Bethel A.M.E. Church site poses an intriguing provenience for this artifact's discovery. During the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, much of Bethel Church's original lot was held by other owners and several houses were erected on it. One of these houses, built ca. 1860, later became a parsonage for the church when it reacquired the property in 1897. The wooden house was built on a partial brick foundation and this buckle was found in the builder's trench for that foundation. This associates the buckle, along with some pottery sherds and an unidentified iron object that were also in the

trench fill, with the construction of the house. How did it get there? Did someone intentionally bury these items?

Men from Easton and Talbot County went to fight in the Civil War on both sides of the conflict. The majority, including all known African-American soldiers from this part of Maryland, fought for the Union, though many white men also served in the Confederate army. Did a member of the Maryland militia who served in one of the Confederate regiments return after the war to live in Easton beside neighbors who had supported the side opposite him? Certainly, many did. Did someone from the Union Army take the plate as a memento and bring it home after facing their fellow Marylanders on the field of battle? It is difficult to know.

In either case, the burial of the militia plate during the construction of this house in the 1860s seems symbolic: a burial of the militia's past association with slave patrols and the service of many Maryland militiamen for the Confederacy; a burial of the conflict itself in an attempt to make Maryland whole again, to move on, and to build a new future. After Bethel Church reacquired the property in 1897 (Schmidt 2014:23), this house became a parsonage (Sanborn Map Company 1907:8; USBC 1910:18B). Ministers and their families lived here and marriages also took place in the house, as several residents who stopped by the site during excavation told the excavation crew in 2015. To be clear, there is no indication that anyone buried this object with these particular symbolic connotations in mind. I instead suggest that this is a meaning we in the present might attach to the brass plate when we see it in its physical and historical contexts. Though the buckle lay in the foundation trench, forgotten by subsequent generations, the symbolic gesture of joining and making whole that its burial represents was continued by the activities of the church as it sustained families and community for the next century and more.

## Toy Soldier

African-American children on The Hill also took part in the commemoration and celebration of military service. I have written earlier about the role of toys in inculcating values in children and this is no less the case when it comes to the meaningfulness of military service to African-American communities like that on The Hill.

This particular toy soldier is mold number 115 produced by the Barclay Toy Company beginning in 1935 (O'Brien 1986:50; Worth Point N.d.; Pauley 2019). It features the roll-collar or lapel uniform coat introduced by the U.S. Army in 1926 and used in the Second World War. The soldier is posed sitting and holding a rifle against one shoulder. This figurine was painted at one time and traces of the orange paint can be seen still clinging to the lead from which the figure was cast.



**Figure 4.3:** Toy soldier from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century occupation of the Freeman site. Produced by the Barclay Toy Company beginning in 1935 and bearing the uniform used through World War II.

The legs have broken off and a helmet, which was not found, has detached from the head of the soldier, leaving a hole in the top of the head where it was affixed. The toy soldier was found in a late twentieth-century fill context a few yards to the south of the rear entrance to Asbury Church in a yard area used by children for recreation.

Toy soldiers are certainly not unique to Easton, nor to African-American children. However, they remind us that the valuation of military service and soldiering started at an early age. And, with the Gardner family living just down the street by 1930 and with other veterans living in the neighborhood as well, the children of The Hill would have grown up with stories of their relatives and neighbors serving in the Civil War and as Buffalo Soldiers and in the First World War, as well as the second. These children played with toy soldiers at a time when African Americans in the armed services still faced considerable discrimination (McGuire 1983). In this way, young black children on The Hill were brought into the struggle for equal citizenship rights and the pathway in that direction that older generations had crafted out of service and its memory.

#### WWII Sweetheart Pin

One of the smallest finds from the Freeman site was a pin from the Second World War. The pin features a shield medallion bearing the words “Remember Pearl Harbor,” connected by a brass chain to the letters “US”. Although I have been thus far unable to find a direct match for the pin anywhere, it closely resembles the “sweetheart pins” of the era. Soldiers, sailors, and marines typically purchased these pins and sent



**Figure 4.4:** “Remember Pearl Harbor” sweetheart pin from World War II, found at the Freeman site.

them home to their girlfriends or wives, or other relatives, who wore them as a sign of solidarity with their men and the war effort.

This pin came from the Freeman site from mid-to-late twentieth-century fill contexts associated with the demolition of two houses built in the nineteenth century and occupied in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by working-class African-American families. Most houses were rented, making identifying the precise residents during the Second World War difficult. It is therefore not possible to say, at the present, which residents had husbands and boyfriends serving overseas at the time. However, women took great part in materially supporting the war, heading their households and families, and in crafting, through a public display of symbols like the shield and lettering on this pin, the semiotic community that underpinned discourse and activism that used military service as a pathway to full citizenship rights. It is possible to picture many women in small communities like that on The Hill wearing these pins and knowing when they saw each other doing so that they were part of a unified front, not just for the United States in the war effort, but for the race as well. Women and men together, as parents, bought and gave toy soldiers to their children. And they played an important part in keeping uniforms clean and pressed in the years after service, and in passing down memories of service to successive generations even when those who had served had passed on. Social relationships between parents, children, lovers, spouses, friends, relatives, and neighbors put these symbols of patriotism into motion and connected them into a conversation about the meaning of military service—a conversation and a set of practices that facilitated political activism toward equality and citizenship for African Americans.

## Conclusion

Military service has been a way forward toward full citizenship rights and equality for African Americans. They made it so in the 1850s. The Civil War brought African Americans en masse into the United States army and navy, where they made major contributions toward winning the war and establishing the meaning behind that victory, which was enshrined in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments. African Americans continued to serve through subsequent wars. During the Second World War, black leaders leveraged the willingness of African Americans to serve and the urgent need for manpower into relaxation of race-based restrictions on recruitment, training, and jobs available within the military, though they did not achieve their primary aim of desegregating the armed forces (McGuire 1983). United States president Harry Truman codified these changes in 1947 with Executive Order 9981, which directed for the end of racial discrimination in the military. His successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower's actions on Integration specifically demonstrate the success of the symbolic and rhetorical link between service and citizenship, which he endorsed in his personal values. In 1946, Eisenhower advised his brother, then president of Kansas State University, to devise a course on citizenship focusing on the development of equality of every citizen before the law and with a goal of using this course of study to advance “the elimination of racial intolerance.” Likewise, when a museum curator asked him in 1947 for a statement on the service of black soldiers in the late war,

he expressed his regret that the service of blacks in the army “has not always received the public recognition or realistic appreciation it merited.” He declared: “Both as Chief of Staff and as an American citizen I oppose any discrimination in the rights and privileges awarded American soldiers based on color or race” (Nichols 2007:10–11).

With continued pressure from African-American leaders and his own experience with the capabilities of black soldiers under his command during World War Two, Dwight D. Eisenhower

completed the integration of the military in the first two years of his term. As African-American servicemen became accustomed to integration and pressured the government to further integrate the civilian world, the end of segregation in the military, and in Washington, D.C., early in Eisenhower's first term provided the backdrop against which the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board* in 1954 (Nichols 2007), strengthening the growing Civil Rights Movement.

Bringing together the picture of cultural meaning established by the military artifacts from excavations on The Hill, their origins, and the contexts in which they were ultimately found reveals the extent to which this push for citizenship rights through military service permeated African-American communities in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. All members of the community—men, women, and children—took part in the celebration and commemoration of military service. The direct actions of the men (and eventually women) who served, themselves, were first and foremost necessary to move the cause forward. However, it took the whole community, sharing a common understanding of the meaning of that service, to create from the grassroots the political force that African-American leaders wielded in achieving strides forward toward equality and citizenship—from Frederick Douglass's lobbying for the United States Colored Troops to Mary McCleod Bethune and the National Council of Negro Women's victory for black women's access to commissions in the Women's Army Corps during World War Two (Smith 1995:xii–xiii) to Walter White and the NAACP's work with Eisenhower to end Segregation inside and outside the American military (Nichols 2007). These political advances were only possible because of the everyday discourses that people in black communities like that located on The Hill carried on through word, deed, and material culture.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Evaluating The Hill Community Project**

The preceding chapters not only fill a niche in scholarship on nineteenth-century free African-American communities, they write a new history for The Hill, one that had not been told before. The disinvestment, physical decay of buildings, and shuttering of African-American-owned business that this neighborhood experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century was accompanied and justified by narratives of crime, drugs, and idleness that made the place, in the minds of many who did not live there, a dangerous part of town to be avoided. These things were partly true: jobless young men did linger on street corners, some sold drugs, and some got themselves into trouble. But these problems were neither innate, nor unsolvable. Negative perceptions of the neighborhood threatened to empower would-be developers who wanted to raze The Hill to make way for something better, someone better. The Hill's negative public image clashed with the value the neighborhood's residents placed on the places and spaces that compose it, values based on personal and collective histories built up over the course of more than two hundred years of local African-American culture and experience. The task before The Hill Community Project was to find, create, and share new narratives that reflected the significance that local residents placed in this place—and, through this work, to help get for residents and community leaders a seat at the table in decisions over the future of the neighborhood so that problems might be fixed without resorting to the wholesale displacement of a community. This was the mandate that Archaeology in Annapolis received from Historic Easton, Inc., and the East End Neighborhood Association and it is what we have worked to achieve through the content and practice of public archaeology on The Hill from 2012 through 2019.



Archaeologists on various projects have sought to use civically-engaged archaeology to promote certain public dialogs in the hope that the practice and findings of archaeological research can generate social and political change (Shackel and Little 2014). Those studying the African American past have been particularly attuned to addressing issues of racism in the past and present through the way in which we conduct our work. In scholarship, archaeologists have taken on the dismantling of oppressive ideologies and the writing of more inclusive, accurate histories. In practice, archaeologists have used the process of research to open up and address power dynamics within the past, the present, and within archaeology itself.

In their scholarship, many archaeologists have undertaken work aimed at piercing ideologies and unmasking racism and other systems of oppression. This approach often entails taking on the production of ideologies as the subject of study and the focus of public interpretation. Critical theory forms the basis of these studies and produces a “critical archaeology” (Leone 1983; Leone et al. 1987; Orser 2007; Mullins 2008; Barton and Somerville 2012). Applications of critical race theory to archaeology have also intersected with critical archaeologies of capitalism, gender, and other systems of power (Franklin 2001; Battle-Baptiste 2011). Since at least the 1990s, there has also been a call within archaeology to turn the lens of critical theory on ourselves and the production of historical narrative (Shanks and Tilley 1996; Franklin 1997; McDavid 2007). This kind of reflexivity is a tool for modeling within archaeological practice the social change we wish to generate through it.

In addition to exposing oppressive ideologies, some archaeologists have sought social change through engaging in critical study of the past as a collaborative experience with descendant community members in an attempt to heal old wounds by acknowledging aspects of difficult pasts that have been previously buried. For example, Edward González-Tennant (2011;

2018) worked with descendants of residents from Rosewood, Florida, to use oral histories and GIS to document the race riot that destroyed Rosewood's black community in 1923. Jed Levin (2011) describes using a viewing platform at a public excavation in Philadelphia as a literal stage for conversations with visitors on African-American history, its erasure from the landscape, and modern race issues. At New Philadelphia, Paul Shackel (2011:xvii,79–88) and his colleagues brought students and descendants together for conversations about race and racism that bridged the past to the present. These forms of archaeological practice follow the model of "Restorative Justice" famous in South Africa's post-Apartheid program of Truth and Reconciliation: they deal honestly and openly with past injustices without attaching blame to anyone in the present so that all parties can move forward together (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2007).

Turning the critical lens on archaeology and the deployment of scholarly authority has also opened archaeological practice up to helping communities to reclaim ownership over their past as a form of redistributive justice. This approach takes as its target the unequal distribution of the power of description that archaeologists and historians often monopolize when writing about other people's heritage (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2007:36). Sometimes, this has meant that members of a descendant community become directly involved in archaeology as scholars (Laroche and Blakey 1997; Spivey 2017). At other times, it has meant making room for non-archaeological epistemologies (Holtorf 2005; Lippert 2008; Skeates 2012). Sometimes, a project takes on a client model with advisory input from stakeholders, either formally through advisory panels (Gallivan and Moretti-Langholtz 2007) or informally through open conversation. The particular form of community involvement often depends on the skills and desires of the stakeholders themselves, as well as the efforts of archaeologists.

In The Hill Community Project, we have gravitated toward the client model while also taking the time to train archaeologists of color, Brittany Hutchinson and Leaira Redondo, who have gone on to successful professional lives elsewhere. Part of the task for The Hill Community Project has been to overcome negative images of crime and danger associated with the neighborhood, especially by people who do not live on The Hill. These external definitions of what The Hill is miss everything of value that its residents see and have legitimized the neighborhood's neglect. Our scholarship on The Hill's history did not create the value that residents held in this neighborhood. However, knowing more about The Hill's past has bolstered these feelings, offered them new depth and documentation, and elevated the voices of residents who were already working hard on behalf of their community.

Whether focusing our scholarship on the realities and functions of historical systems of oppression, teaching our students to be more sensitive to racism in the present, or seeking to empower a particular marginalized group to tell its own story, many archaeologists would like to think that our work contributes to positive social change, such as the dismantling of American racism. "Community archaeology" advocates have been particularly vocal in proclaiming various forms of collaboration as a tool for social change (Little 2007). However, archaeology's contributions in this regard are often vague while the results of oppression can be found in concrete disparities of public health, income, education, and interpersonal violence. I am not alone in wondering whether archaeologists often think we are making more of a difference on these big-ticket issues than we really are (Simpson and Williams 2008; Carman 2011). Even on the local level, consistent public engagement efforts are not guaranteed to produce social change. In a project in Baltimore, Maryland, with similar goals to The Hill Community Project, Robert Chidester and David Gadsby sought to use public archaeology to ameliorate the effects of

gentrification on a working-class neighborhood. However, they ran up repeatedly against residents' unwillingness to engage with one another and disinterest in critically engaging class issues, despite some well-attended public history events (Chidester and Gadsby 2009; Gadsby and Chidester 2011).

To question the efficacy of engaged archaeology in tackling racism, capitalism, sexism, or other oppressions writ large is not to say that open, multivocal, critical discourse and scholarship is not a part of more localized efforts. In the context of The Hill, community empowerment is based in redefining historical narratives and the identity of The Hill and its residents. However, broad social change is hard to quantify and it is important not to lose sight of the immediate, concrete needs of people's everyday lives when working to pierce ideologies and restore ownership over identity. As a result, research on The Hill has been about telling the history of the early generations of free people of color in Easton and the contributions they made to the town. But it has also been about repairing deteriorated houses, increasing homeownership, reducing crime, and generating tourism.

Were we successful? As the The Hill Community Project approaches a close in 2020, I have sat down with community leaders in Easton for interviews to construct an oral history of the project and to assess the impact that the findings and practice of public archaeological research have had on the political landscape of the town and on the situation on The Hill. These leaders include Carlene Phoenix, president of Historic Easton, Inc., deputy director of the Town of Easton Housing Authority, and member and former trustee of Asbury United Methodist Church; Priscilla Morris, treasurer of Historic Easton, former member of Easton's historic district commission, and member of Third Haven Friends' (Quaker) Meeting; Robert C. Willey, mayor of the Town of Easton; and Lynn B. Thomas, the town's planner. While the project has been a

general success in galvanizing efforts to promote historic preservation, revitalization, and affordable housing on The Hill, it became evident in this series of conversations that the major impact of archaeology for much of the project's duration was simply the visible presence of researchers in the neighborhood. In order to solidify the gains this project has made, it will be necessary to solidify a durable, complex narrative of the neighborhood's history and significance and to do so in a way that places the interpretation of the neighborhood's history in local, community hands. This process is beginning to take shape.

#### Successes: Housing on The Hill Initiative

Since we began excavations in 2012, we've seen some solid successes on the preservation and revitalization side of the project. Just a couple of months after we wrapped up fieldwork at the Buffalo Soldier Home, Mayor Robert Willey issued a moratorium on demolition of old houses on The Hill. That bought enough time to secure funds from the governor's office, in 2015, for the Housing on The Hill initiative. Supervised at the town level, this initiative provides for renovating several historic houses on The Hill and making them available for subsidized sale in order to promote affordable housing, historic preservation, and community social integrity through increased homeownership, all at the same time. Work began in 2018 and the first two houses, including the flagship Buffalo Soldier Home, were completed November 2019. At a public dedication of this renovated home, Lieutenant Governor of Maryland Boyd Rutherford announced additional funds from the state for the housing initiative, based on the preliminary successes. In January 2020, the Town of Easton closed a sale of one of the first houses and plans to use the revenue from each sale to fund more renovations. In addition to

buying, renovating, and selling derelict homes, the Town of Easton is also using these funds to aid homeowners in making repairs that they otherwise could not afford to make. The initiative has been so successful that it has grown to encompass the entire town (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Although directed by the Town of Easton, this initiative embodies the historic preservation and revitalization goals that originated in EENA and HEI's earlier work. It also aims to promote these goals without generating displacement and gentrification by making funds available to current homeowners and by subsidizing the sale of renovated homes:

WILLEY: I guess the one thing that we've had to be mindful of is...you don't want to rebuild these places and...price the existing neighbors out of the neighborhood—the gentrification, which I think is an over-used term...It's not hard to spend a lot of money on anything, especially when you're rehabbin' and renovatin' it. And you can run the price up particularly on individual homes. So that's been a concern, is how do we keep costs in line with existing folks and allow them the opportunity to move back in?

THOMAS: And trying to be sensitive to the historic...that sort of increases prices.

WILLEY: And you don't want to set people up to fail, so you really can't...price the houses to the point where you recover all your money at once. But, at the same time, I can look over here on South Street and see some of those rehabs that are going on. The people that were in there aren't going to be able to afford to move back into those houses. So how do you keep everything under—under control and moving in the right direction? That's been a big problem...We've been able to do that with...assistance from...the federal government. Also from the state government...And we've also had it from the local business community and...individual contributors. So it's a combination of everything, but when you get it all working in the same direction, it tends to work a little bit...But if you take a house like the one we just settled on Friday, that would cost us close to \$200,000 to buy and—uh—renovate, and we sell it for \$129,000, there has to be help from somewhere to breach that gap. So that's where we been looking for. (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

The Housing on The Hill Initiative, as a product of The Hill Community Project, is an example of the way in which community activism, supported by scholarly research, can empower marginalized communities and promote socially just revitalization.

Housing on The Hill also supports crime reduction. The renovation of the Buffalo Soldier Home has meant that the once abandoned house can no longer be used to stash drugs, as Yvonne Freeman told me shortly before she retired from Easton's police force. Priscilla Morris pointed out a neighborhood with fewer vacant houses is better able to keep an eye on things and maintain order (personal interview January 2, 2020).

There have thus been some successes in turning the course of The Hill away from demolition by neglect and displacement toward something that preserves the heritage and social fabric of the neighborhood. What role did public archaeology play in these successes? Based on my interviews with local leaders, archaeology on The Hill attracted attention and forced a consideration of historical significance into development decisions. But the role of archaeology has been largely indirect and it still remains to be seen if publicly-engaged archaeology can sustain, in the long run, the changes that local activists sought.

### Turning the Tide

The first excavation, at the Buffalo Soldier Home in 2012, was pivotal in the campaign to get attention and support for revitalizing The Hill. In looking back over the course of the project, both Mrs. Phoenix and Mrs. Morris pointed to the recovery of two U.S. Army buttons at the Buffalo Soldier Home in 2012 as a turning point in the political fight for the future of The Hill. As Mrs. Phoenix says, these physical pieces of evidence bolstered their argument that there was something significant about The Hill's history: "I think the goal was to take two women serious that there was something here... We knew that there was a significance and the goal was to have someone believe that there was something here. And we accomplished that" (personal interview

with Carlene Phoenix December 17, 2019). Mrs. Morris recalls that, just as one of the buttons was coming out of the ground, historian Ira Berlin rolled up in a big University of Maryland tour bus with teachers taking a summer course. Residents flocked to the site to see what all the excitement was about and Berlin offered a quote from Frederick Douglass on the significance of the military uniform to black Civil War soldiers that connected the site to the national freedom struggle (Personal interview with Priscilla Morris, January 2, 2020). With that kind of national significance and public appeal, the preservation and revitalization effort began to make headway. Town officials also recognize 2012 as a turning point. According to Mayor Robert Willey, “the idea of The Hill being any kind of a project at all was just unheard-of... There was nothing to support that theory and there was nothing to support the work and the money that were going to be required to do it [begin renovations and revitalization].” Lynn Thomas concurred:

The archaeological study is really what kicked all this off. It...has become the impetus for change out there, in that it...identified the importance of The Hill Community—or confirmed it—or both, I guess. ...it also even just the act of the digs kind of raised the profile. There were a lot of questions of, “What are those people doing out there, what are they looking for?” You know, so that kind of raised the profile. And, as we learned about the importance, that has led to investment in the community on...the part of the town. (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Both Mr. Willey and Mr. Thomas visited the excavations in 2012 and 2013. Neither of these key officials toured excavations in subsequent years and, when discussing the project in January 2020, neither named any of the other sites that had been excavated from 2014 through 2019. Beyond 2012, both Phoenix and Morris separately said that archaeology’s main contribution was simply the consistent presence of researchers visibly in the field, year after year. The continued annual presence of our summer field school and appearances at community events throughout the rest of the year demonstrated a clear investment by the University of Maryland. Whether



they understood the content of the research, this investment made an impact on town officials like Mayor Willey:

With The Hill, what I can remember seeing them dig out of those little square holes they were into was stuff that would just bore me to tears to try to dig this out. But, obviously, they were finding stuff that they could relate to other stuff and various times in the past and history. And I guess that was the amazing part, to try to find out what they had dug up and how it related in time was major (Willey, personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Both Mr. Willey and Mr. Thomas recognized the connections between research, tourism, renovation, and economic vitality:

THOMAS: I know that the tourism folks have certainly latched onto—um—the importance of The Hill and the potential to increase tourism in that area. And all these things I am confident have informed the Small Area Plan—um—that we hope to see soon...And then, we'll see where that goes from there. Typically, comprehensive plans and neighborhood plans like we're expecting—um—you know—influence any number of things, including land use regulations and economic development strategies, etc. etc. So—um, you know—it has been a catalyst for change and a lot more is likely to be coming as a result, all going back to those initial archaeological research.

...WILLEY: It certainly opened the doors to Easton as the kind of place where history did take place and they're certainly willing to listen to what went on and what they can do to keep it—keep it mindful. And that was probably the big thing that I can see coming out of all this (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

It thus meant, perhaps, more to local officials that scholars had found something worthwhile on The Hill than what specifically it was they had found. Both Mr. Willey and Mr. Thomas reflected a general enthusiasm for the neighborhood's historic nature even though neither became intimately familiar with the details of that history. Still, that was sufficient for them to act. When I asked both Mrs. Phoenix and Mrs. Morris, as well, if there were particular narratives, artifacts, historical people, or other research discoveries that had been substantial in the conversations with officials at the town and state level, both of them told me that other factors were much more significant. This wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear. We hadn't been there to make a show of it and I'd hoped that the content of the research had been more useful.

However, their answer represented several mis-steps the project team made along the way in taking too long to pass off the fruits of our labor to our partners and the general public.

The project especially struggled to sustain oral history collection. Several researchers came and went, recordings and consent forms got lost in the shuffle, transcriptions went unfinished, and little actually made its way back to the community. This meant that, when Yvonne Freeman ultimately took over oral history, she had a hard time getting people to sit down with her even though she'd grown up in the community and everyone knew her.

In terms of archaeological research, because of the nature of that research and the time it takes to process, identify, and analyze collections, many of the more powerful stories took years to really come out of the assemblages we recovered from the five sites we excavated. Only in late 2019 at the writing of this dissertation have the major narratives about family structure, children's toys, military artifacts, and church histories have really come together. But residents regularly saw the archaeological team visibly and publicly working hard and the political momentum moved on without conclusive archaeological findings.

### Building Political Momentum

What really moved the political wheels to achieve the preservation vision that Carlene Phoenix and Priscilla Morris had laid out? Archaeology may have given a boost but, at the local level, personal connections and trust between officials and constituents were vital. The mayor had a personal connection to the neighborhood through his grandfather business, which framed his appreciation for history and for the history of The Hill in particular:

Over on Higgins. He had a grocery store there and, after he passed away, we were—were throwing out his stuff—we were cleaning out his stuff to find out what was there

and we found a box of...calendars he had gotten as customer...gifts from 1946...So we still have one on the utility room wall. So hope we don't make a mistake and put something on there we're supposed to do and it'd be the wrong date. But, anyway, it was 1946 and he was out there (Willey, personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Local activists appreciated the mayor's prior relationship to The Hill. Says Mrs. Phoenix:

It's good when you have a mayor who's local and he has some history in this Hill...he looked at it personally...And so it's not like it was unfamiliar to him...And, you know, formin' that relationship too. 'Cause we all had a good—Historic Easton, Asbury Church, we just have a good relationship with our town officials...Just a matter of talkin', going to meetings, talking to him. And there wasn't a lot of us. And showin' the significance—that, hey, we don't want our history destroyed. You know, we've lost enough African-American history in this town. We don't want to lose any more. We just can't lost *this* neighborhood...and he was open to it. (Personal interview with Carlene Phoenix December 17, 2019).

Personal connections were therefore likely far more influential at the local level than anything we learned from the material record.

Building the necessary relationships to move the goalposts forward on Historic Easton's objectives also was made easier by the way in which their concerns for housing rehabilitation and historic preservation fit into preexisting town plans for work on neighborhood stabilization. Although Mr. Willey had worked with Mrs. Morris early in the 2000s on a survey of rental and homeownership rates and the status of the town's rental units, he had not made major strides forward on The Hill or elsewhere in town on that issue when The Hill Community Project began. The project offered him an alliance to achieve these objectives.

Alongside the town government's standing interest in housing, Easton also has a long record of interest in historic preservation, dating to the work of historic architect and sometime archaeologist Henry Chandlee Forman in the mid-twentieth century (Forman 1956). Easton does not have archaeological regulations but it does have an active historic district commission to manage the historic district. Activity in this regard has mainly focused on the business area

downtown around the county courthouse in previous decades. As a result, town officials already had a desire to work on preserving historic character in new developments, a desire on which work on The Hill built:

THOMAS: And I think it verifies Easton as an authentic place. You know, we don't have to make something up. We have actual, real history here. It's significant history that happened here. Um—and, in terms of the basis—or how it relates to our planning, you know, we have always—I think it's fair to say—um—even before the time there was a planner here, the—the town fathers have held the downtown in a special sort of reverence if you [will]. That might be overstating it, but I think we have long recognized the importance of the original downtown Easton and the historic areas and have protected it accordingly and have used it as the basis of a lot of things, including—you know—we have said, “Hey, we made a mistake in the way our development looked in the ‘60s and ‘70s. We want to take a step back and make it look more like what it did historically in Easton. So I think, going forward, future development that doesn't exist now—out on greenfields around town—will look more like—um—the areas around us here in downtown than the—for lack of a better term, the suburban tract that we unfortunately got some of.

WILLEY: I don't know if you saw it in your work or not, but they had actually uncovered some of the surveyors' stones—whatever they call those markers that laid out the downtown of Easton. So they didn't just pick a field and say, “I need a street here and one crossing it this way and one to run north and south.” But they actually had starting points and so forth. In fact, the utilities wanted to charge me so much to take that one out of the ground, I said, “No, you can't do that. That's your stone. You can pay to have it done whatever you want to do with it but it stays right where it is. And it became the marker for the inn right over here. So—uh—Dover and Hanson Street.

THOMAS: 202

WILLEY: Plus, there's one in back of the old armory that's there. So there's a couple of 'em around. But those are the kind of things you look at, you think, “That's very obtrusive. It's in the way. We ought to take it up and throw it away.” Well, you can't do that. I mean, it's got to stay. And the other one that hits me—uh—was on Aurora Street. The one sidewalk was about that much higher than the other. And what they determined was that people came with carriages and they stepped out onto that stone instead of having a long step down to the ground. So it's those kind of things that you figure are just a hindrance and they ought to be done away with but they really do have a purpose and they should stay where they are. So I guess that's another good thing that's come out of this is that we found stuff we didn't even know we had. It's like goin' up in the attic for a yard sale (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

The town's prior interest in historic preservation, along with its interest in housing and neighborhood stabilization, made fertile ground for lobbying by Mrs. Phoenix, Mrs. Morris, and Professor Green. It meant that these advocates could approach the town as allies, rather than as antagonists and to work positively toward shared goals rather than shaming an obstructive administration into spending money it didn't want to on projects that it opposed. Mr. Willey and Mr. Thomas used The Hill Community Project's ongoing work and some aspects of its findings, which they wrote into funding requests. Says Thomas, "You'd obviously have to ask the folks on the other end of the grant application how important it was to them but we certainly have played it up in our applications" (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

### *Superlatives*

The particular historic point that Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas played up in their fundraising work with the State of Maryland on behalf of Easton and The Hill was the concept that the neighborhood was significant as an early free African-American neighborhood, possibly the oldest one still inhabited by descendants of its first free black residents. This superlative caught the town's attention and did some major heavy lifting in terms of fundraising—even though the claim itself is tenuous at best.

The neighborhood of Tremé in New Orleans currently holds the title of oldest African-American neighborhood in the United States. Tremé was established in 1812 when the City of New Orleans incorporated Claude Tremé's plantation as one of several faubourgs, or suburbs, to house an urban population that was doubling as a result of refugees fleeing the turbulence of the

Haitian Revolution. Tremé's residents always included a mix of white creoles, free biracial creoles of color, and slaves. There is no indication that free people of color ever made up a majority of Tremé's residents or even resided there in larger numbers than elsewhere in New Orleans. However, free people of color were among the neighborhood's property owners since the plantation first began to be subdivided in the 1790s and a number of prominent New Orleans creoles of color founded institutions and organizations in Tremé that fundamentally shaped the neighborhood's culture and history (Crutcher 2010:28).

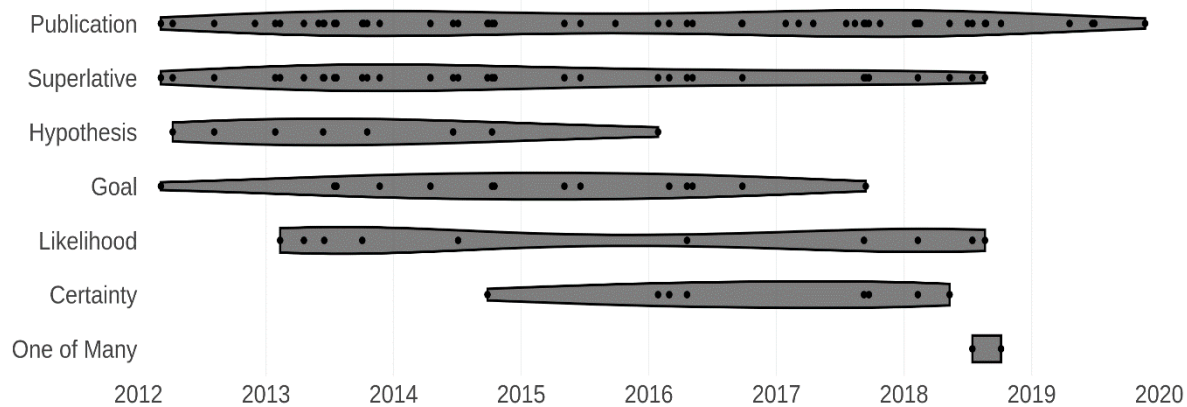
The histories of Tremé and The Hill—and, indeed, the many similarities between them—make discerning which holds the greater claim to the title difficult. The issue revolves around subjective judgments as to what defines an African-American neighborhood: landownership or residence? How much? Cultural dominance? In what ways? Both neighborhoods included African-American landowners, as well as others, in the eighteenth century but residential segregation did not take hold in either place until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Yet, many residents in both communities can trace their ancestry back in the same neighborhood for many generations, creating a link of continuity between the earliest free residents of color and those living there today (Crutcher 2010:15–16). In both places, free people of color, along with those who were enslaved, built social institutions and organizations that were located or came to be located in these neighborhoods even if the people involved lived over a larger geographic area (Crutcher 2010:36). As a result, both Tremé and The Hill became nexuses of African-American society and culture even if they were not completely distinguishable through residence patterns. The hazy issues of how many residents or businesses or institutions of color make for an African-American neighborhood and the limitations of available evidence mean that it may never be clear whether The Hill is, indeed, older than Tremé. Certainly, the possibility exists. And it

is this possibility that has animated much of the research and preservationist energy behind The Hill Community Project and its successes.

To see what kind of place the superlative notion of The Hill as “the oldest continuously-inhabited free African-American community in the United States” had in discourse surrounding the project, I pulled every newspaper article about our work on The Hill in the *Easton Star-Democrat* from 2012 through 2019. This enabled me to chart the appearances of this superlative over time against appearances of other statements about the neighborhood’s significance. The project received various other segments of news coverage, most notably in 2013, when the *Washington Post* (Ruane 2013) and the *Baltimore Sun* (Wood 2013) ran stories. Front page on the *Post* meant the project reached the nation’s attention, as did the story in the *Sun*, which I remember seeing reprinted, in part, in a Vermont newspaper while traveling there that summer. However, the *Star-Democrat*, to which locals in Easton refer fondly as the *Star-Dem*, gave the project its most consistent coverage and played a large part in shaping the project’s conceptualization for the local public whose support we needed in order to build political capital and achieve the lobbying and fundraising goals Historic Easton had laid out. The *Star-Democrat* covered various aspects of the project—research, public engagement events, and the advancement of the preservation initiative—consistently throughout the project’s duration, with somewhat heavier coverage in 2013 and 2017–2018. Staff writer Chris Polk conducted the lion’s share of reporting on The Hill and The Hill Community Project. Ms. Polk attended almost every major public event that the project team hosted, regularly visited archaeological excavations, and brought the project’s news to the Town of Easton. Indeed, Ms. Polk’s reporting played a major role in generating public energy around the project that Mrs. Phoenix, Mrs. Morris, and Professor Green were able to harness to make the project a success. Work by other

reporters, as well as press releases that Historic Easton, Dale Green, and I crafted, also rounded out the coverage. Charting, over time, statements in these articles about the neighborhood’s significance makes it clear that the superlative was consistently dominant for most of the project’s duration but that the discussion around it changed over time and other bases of significance also played a significant role in establishing The Hill as a place worthy of investment.

Dale Green introduced the idea that The Hill was important because it was the oldest of a particular type of neighborhood from the start of the project and Kelley Allen picked it up in the first 2012 article on The Hill. While covering a separate and pre-existing effort by Easton’s Affordable Housing Coalition to revitalize part of The Hill, Allen noted that Dale Green and his



**Figure 5.1:** Shape of the discourse about the superlative. This fiddle graph breaks down the various ways in which the notion that The Hill was “the oldest continuously-inhabited free African-American neighborhood in the United States” appeared in newspaper coverage of The Hill Community Project in the Easton Star-Democrat. The width of each line corresponds to the frequency with which a particular usage occurred. Generally, the discourse on the superlative shifted from hypothesis to goal and likelihood, moving toward certainty, and then was more or less abandoned for a broader view of The Hill as one of many similar communities. Relative frequency as measured in line thickness is internal to each data series, meaning that it indicates the frequency of occurrence of each form of significance with regard to other occurrences of the same significance argument, but the line thicknesses do not indicate which form of the superlative was most dominant in any particular time.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Figures 5.1 and 5.2 were constructed using the algorithms built into Plotly.com’s online platform.



team were “working to prove an area known as “The Hill,” of which the rehab zone is in, is the oldest African-American neighborhood in the country” (Allen 2012:A1). Professor Green thus introduced the notion as the chief objective of all research in which team members were engaged. However, as news of the project traveled in public and academic circles, Professor Green’s ambition did not pass without pushback. He made the first claims for The Hill just as Tremé was commemorating its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Scholars researching the history of an early eighteenth-century freed-slave settlement outside Fort Moshe, in what was then Spanish Florida, also rightfully challenged some early less-than-careful phrasing about The Hill being the “earliest” free African-American neighborhood. Professor Green informed the project team about these challenges at meetings in 2012 and 2013 that I attended as head archaeologist on the project. As a result of these challenges, Professor Green formulated several qualifiers to his superlative: “oldest,” rather than “earliest,” and a related, redundant emphasis on The Hill’s continuous inhabitation in order to get around such places as Fort Moshe that were clearly earlier but no longer had intact residential communities. So The Hill became “the oldest continuously-inhabited free African-American neighborhood in the United States.” Green also learned to hedge his bets, emphasizing in interviews that informed press coverage that The Hill “may prove to be” such a place, not that it necessarily was. As a result, although the superlative first appeared as a project goal, most early reporting cast it as a hypothesis (Polk 2012a; Polk 2012b; Polk 2013a; Polk 2013d; Polk 2013i; *Star-Democrat* 2014a; Polk 2014; Bollinger 2016). It was something around which to build research. This was perhaps the most productive form it could have taken at the time, but, by the end of 2014, the superlative virtually ceased to appear in its hypothesis form.

The superlative Dale Green claimed for The Hill continued to appear regularly throughout the ensuing years as a project goal (Polk 2013f; Polk 2013g; Polk 2013j; Bollinger 2014a; Polk 2014; *Star-Democrat* 2014c; Polk 2015a; Bollinger 2015; Polk 2016a; Polk 2016b; Polk 2016c; Polk 2016d; Polk 2017b). The usage of the term during this time gradually drifted toward certainty. Already by 2013, the public understanding of the superlative began to be that it was a strong possibility—not quite yet proven but sure to be so very soon (Polk 2013b; Polk 2013c; Polk 2013e; Polk 2013h; Lyons 2014; Polk 2016b; Bollinger 2017a; *Star-Democrat* 2018; Polk 2018b; Rivas 2018). In late 2014, an unsigned editorial marked the first discussion in which all shreds of hesitation disappeared and the claim appeared outright (*Star-Democrat* 2014b). Other statements of certainty followed (Bollinger 2016; Polk 2016a; Polk 2016b; Bollinger 2017a; *Star-Democrat* 2017b; *Star-Democrat* 2018; Fisher 2018). By 2016, certainty fairly completely replaced hypothesis in the appearance of the superlative in the local paper. Some reports from the start of 2016 through the first half of 2018 waffled, presenting the superlative as both a likelihood and a certainty within the same article or fudging the boundary between the two. However, certainty appeared most frequently by the time we were getting into 2018.

Some of the project team members were hesitant to jump on the bandwagon from the start and remained so throughout the project. I tend to have a deep-seated aversion to superlatives and the semantic contortions that their boosters typically need to make in order to achieve any modicum of scholarly integrity. As we went on, Cindy Schmidt's research on land records indicated that the areas around Asbury and Bethel Churches only became predominantly African-American after the Civil War, when racial segregation hardened social boundaries in geographic terms that had not characterized Federal or Antebellum residential patterns: before

the Civil War, black and white, free and enslaved, all lived side-by-side in Easton. Even in the twentieth century, the African-American neighborhoods around the two churches never quite grew together to form a single cohesive neighborhood. Tremé presents these same issues, leading historical geographer Michael Crutcher to suggest that “the neighborhood of Tremé as it is presently imagined did not exist before the early twentieth century” (2010:36). Nonetheless, as in Tremé and New Orleans, the social, economic, and cultural contributions of The Hill’s African-American residents to Easton remain unassailable. Even if an exact date could ever be established, I always worried over placing all the hopes of the community and the future of the political project on a superlative claim that might be taken away five or twenty years down the road if some scholars looking at a community elsewhere uncovered evidence that *it* was older than The Hill. Because such a circumstance would have pulled the rug out from under our colleagues in Easton fairly substantially, I considered overemphasis of a flimsy claim to fame as a form of scholarly malpractice. The difficulties with establishing exact start dates for either neighborhood have led my own work on The Hill to deemphasize the superlative claim and to focus on questions that I could more substantially answer through historical archaeology—questions relating to who lived in the neighborhood, what their lives were like, and what kind of culture they built.

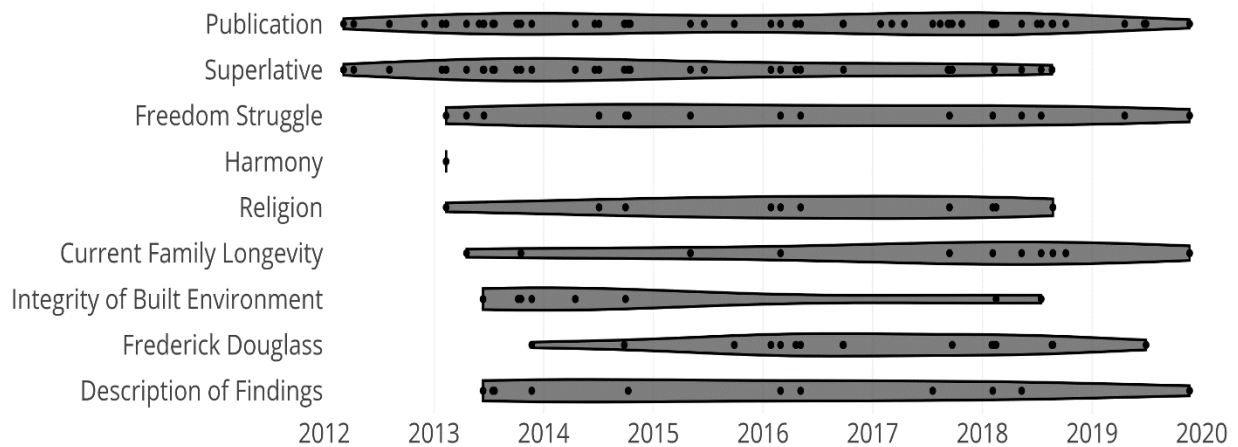
In 2018, the written discourse about The Hill began to turn in this direction. The superlative dropped away in favor of increased emphasis on other statements of significance related to African-Americans’ ongoing freedom struggle, the integrity of family legacies and the built environment, and other discussions. Professor Green had begun to focus on other projects and only appeared in Easton sporadically. Since I still had a major annual presence with the University of Maryland Field School, which, since 2016, had increased our time on The Hill

from three weeks to six in June and July, I became, for better or worse, the leading public face of the project. In that capacity, I told *Star-Democrat* reporter Chris Polk my concerns over the superlative while she covered presentations by our students at the end of the field school in July 2018. She printed my full explanation of a better alternative, one that situated The Hill within the network of pre-Civil-War free African-American communities that communicated regularly and led much of the abolition movement and the Underground Railroad themselves (see Horton and Horton 1995; Sterling 1998 [1973]; Rael 2002; La Roche 2014). Ms. Polk had done the lion's share of reporting on our research on The Hill and had the most influence over the project's public image. She marked the transition in her article on that event (Polk 2018b), which starts with the superlative as a likelihood before pivoting away from it toward recasting The Hill as "one of" several early free African-American communities. Kayla Rivas (2018) repeated the superlative briefly as a likelihood in an article a month later about an event where Green spoke. And then that was that. The superlative has not appeared in the *Star-Democrat* since.

#### *Other statements of significance*

In addition to statements about The Hill's potential superlative position among other African-American places, several other arguments for the neighborhood's significance floated in the discourse surrounding The Hill Community Project. The superlative remained consistently the most talked-about significance throughout most of the project, but the others helped to give shape both to the superlative itself and what it might mean and, toward the end of the project, to the meaning that might be ascribed to The Hill in the absence of a singular claim to fame.

Throughout most of the project’s duration, the superlative maintained an unchallenged dominance in the discourse about The Hill. It predates all other considerations of significance by a year—more in some cases—and remained frequent until midway through 2018. Early in 2013 discourses around The Hill began to include additional statements about the neighborhood’s significance. Green briefly experimented with the idea that The Hill was a place of racial harmony (Polk 2013b), based on preliminary indications of antebellum residential integration and the absence of any documented race riots in the neighborhood. However, oral history interviews indicate that there were instances of violence surrounding the integration of schools in the 1950s and ‘60s, including fights between children and an attempted bombing of the street corner where black students gathered to head to school, which was never prosecuted (Oral



**Figure 5.2:** Shape of the discourse around the significance of The Hill. This fiddle graph displays the relative frequencies with which various statements pertaining to The Hill’s significance were made in newspaper articles about The Hill Community Project in the Easton Star-Democrat. The Hill was said, at various times and sometimes at the same time, to be a place of historical significance because it was “the oldest continuously-inhabited free African-American neighborhood in the United States,” because of what it could tell us about the African-American freedom struggle, because it was a place of racial harmony, because it was the origin of African-American Methodism on the Eastern Shore, because so many of the current residents descended from families who had lived there since the neighborhood’s earliest years, and because of connections to Frederick Douglass. These are matched, for reference, against the frequency of articles about the project and of articles disseminating specific research findings. Relative frequency as measured in line thickness is internal to each data series, meaning that it indicates the frequency of occurrence of each form of significance with regard to other occurrences of the same significance argument, but the line thicknesses do not indicate which statement of significance was most dominant in any particular time.

history interview with Eric Dashiell by the author, October 23, 2013; oral history interview with Nellie Sullivan, date unknown (ca. 2014); Polk 2018a). Although I heard Professor Green repeat this idea occasionally for a year or two afterward, the facts of the matter may be the reason it only appeared once in print. Professor Green also adjusted his presentations on The Hill over time to reflect these kinds of research developments as our understanding of The Hill improved.

In addition, Professor Green brought with him to the project the story of Shadrack Bassett's 1818 sermon in Easton and organization of an African Methodist Episcopal church that located at Bethel, on Hanson Street, in 1820. His own ancestor, Alexander Walker Wayman, wrote about the occasion in his (1881) memoir and serves as the source of the story. As a result, Professor Green began to explore the possibility that Easton's free African-American community served a pivotal role in the history of African Methodism, and particularly in the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, on Maryland's Eastern Shore (Polk 2013b; Lyons 2014; Bollinger 2014b; Bollinger 2016; Polk 2016a; Polk 2016c; Polk 2017b; Polk 2018a; Connolly 2018b; Polk 2018c). This discussion gained steam beginning in 2016, in the running-up to Bethel Church's bicentennial in 2018. The third source of significance to arise in early 2013 was the point that the free African-American experience on The Hill began particularly early. Here, people were able to own property, raise families, build churches and businesses, and take a more active role in structuring their own lives than was possible for those who were enslaved. The project continued to serve as a window into the black freedom struggle throughout the rest of the project (Polk 2013b; Polk 2013c; Polk 2013e; Lyons 2014; Bollinger 2014b; Polk 2014; Polk 2015a; Polk 2016a; Polk 2016c; Polk 2017b; Polk 2018a; Fisher 2018; Polk 2018b; Polk 2019a; Polk 2019b). Whether these alternative statements of significance arose because of the initial

challenges to the superlative that scholars elsewhere raised or whether they came about because of the organic growth of the project, they were soon joined by others.

The initial statements of significance focused on national themes in American history and heritage. However, even before 2013 was halfway through, the discourse surrounding The Hill Community Project began to attribute significance on a local level to the people and places of The Hill itself. It was quickly becoming clear that many of the African-American families on The Hill had lived there for generations. The longevity of these families in this place formed the basis on which Green amended his superlative to include the phrase “continuously-inhabited.” This particular line of thinking did not gain too much traction for the first several years of the project. But it has come in the last few years to play a larger role, the increasing frequency of its mentioning mirroring precisely the decline in the usage of the superlative (Polk 2013c; Polk 2013i; Polk 2015a; Polk 2016a; Polk 2017b; Polk 2018a; Fisher 2018; Polk 2018b; Polk 2018c; Polk 2018d; Polk 2019b). It is important to view The Hill’s residents as significant in their own right, not merely in terms of what was or was not happening elsewhere in the country. Focusing on the residents and their ancestors’ connections to the neighborhood and the places that make it up offered a grounding for wide-ranging narratives and a way of ensuring that the histories we write about The Hill remain relevant to the people who live here. In like manner, 2013 and 2014 discussions of The Hill included several mentions of the significance of its built environment and the integrity of its heritage above-ground in its architecture and below-ground in its archaeology (Polk 2013d; *Star-Democrat* 2013; Polk 2013i; Polk 2013j; Bollinger 2014a; Bollinger 2014b). Like the focus on family longevity, discussions of The Hill’s physical integrity were based firmly in what had happened in this neighborhood, rather than elsewhere. They also directly related to residents’ goals of preservation and renewal: there would have been nothing to

preserve if what was here had already lost its integrity and was no longer possible to save. The discussion of physical integrity went dormant throughout the middle part of the project before cropping back up as the first two houses renovated as part of the Housing on The Hill Initiative neared completion in 2018 (Connolly 2018b; Polk 2018b), thereby anchoring the beginning and end of the process of achieving those restorations.

Finally, it is impossible to do much work in heritage in the twenty-first century in Talbot County without making at least some reference to Frederick Douglass. The Hill Community Project was preceded by a years-long battle over statues in front of the county courthouse in Easton that led to the erection in 2011 of a monument to the famous abolitionist, who was born in the county ca. 1818. However, Douglass did not directly enter the media discourse about the project on The Hill until the project was well underway (Polk 2013j; *Star-Democrat* 2014b; Polk 2015b; Bollinger 2016; Polk 2016a; Polk 2016b; Polk 2016c; *Star-Democrat* 2016; Polk 2016d; *Star-Democrat* 2017b; Connolly 2018a; *Star-Democrat* 2018; Connolly 2018b; Rivas 2018; Polk 2018c; ). Douglass' two main connections to the people of The Hill are his stay in the county jail as a young man, where he watched waiters going to work at the hotel across the street (Douglass 1855:300), and his visit in 1878 to dedicate the current buildings at both Asbury and Bethel Churches (see chapter 2.) Mark Leone suggested early on that this might mean that the neighborhood of free people informed a young Douglass' conception of what it meant to be free (Leone 2017:xxxvii). But this idea did not really catch on in public discourse. Members of The Hill Community's project team have also taken advantage of what have become frequent local events celebrating Douglass' life and legacy in order to conduct public engagement on The Hill. Once the superlative dropped out of use in mid-2018, discussion about connections with Douglass continued to buoy The Hill as a significant place, along with emphasis on the freedom



struggle, the longevity of families living in the neighborhood, and the publicly visible presence of research, principally the University of Maryland archaeological field school.

Despite its eventual abandonment and the increased diversity of statements of significance in the discourse around The Hill, the superlative notion of this neighborhood as the oldest free African-American neighborhood in the United States had an undeniable staying power that made considerable political hay. As Mr. Willey puts it, “the further we got into this, the—the further the conversation got to be about the oldest free African-American neighborhood in the country...wow! We’re at the top of something, you know, not finding our way to the top...Consequently...we’ve got projects underway” (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020). Carlene Phoenix concurs:

The biggest one was this: when Dale said we’re older than Treme, I think that did it. I honestly do believe that. Because if somebody wants to claim that they still have the oldest African—existin’ African-American community...when it was discovered that we was older than Treme, I think that really drew the interest. And the fact that they’re existing. Because even though there’re older communities...it still exists and I think that was the key...That brought the momentum (personal interview with Carlene Phoenix, December 17, 2019).

The notion of The Hill as a uniquely ancient free black community has also been immensely popular in the community. I can’t number the times people have stopped me on the street and asked me when archaeology was going to “prove” that The Hill was “the oldest.” In terms of political capital and local pride, this superlative notion has proved immensely powerful.

The Hill probably isn’t the oldest anything. But its archaeological and historical record represent broad trends in the history of free African Americans throughout the history of the United States. Superlatives may be politically powerful, but the stories of particular people and the everyday culture of the community as told through the archaeological record will ultimately sustain this place’s significance in the long term. As Lynn Thomas puts it,

It's the story behind the headlines. So it's obvious to get excited that we've been identified as the oldest or the first anything. But to think about what that means, that there were actually freed African Americans living side by side with European Americans what, 90 to 100 years almost before the abolition of slavery is pretty remarkable. Um—and, to the extent that this has helped to tell that story or can better illustrate that story, that's the real—um—highlight to me (personal interview with Robert Willey and Lynn Thomas, January 13, 2020).

Excitement about The Hill and its heritage spread very rapidly during The Hill Community Project on the basis of the possibility that the neighborhood might have a claim to the title of oldest African-American neighborhood in the United States. However intriguing that possibility has been, the real staying power of The Hill has been the stories of the people who lived here, whose descendants still live here, and what their lives were like. The success of the project ultimately depends on substantial research and scholarship in order to sustain the investment now underway on The Hill.

### Offering Something More Concrete

In order to correct the mistake of taking all the collections back to the lab and saying, “we’ll present this when we have a good idea of what it says,” I started in 2017 closing our field schools with presentations on the most interesting artifacts we’d found. It was too soon out of the field to do deep-ranging comparative analyses but I asked each student to highlight a different artifact class or specific artifact and what it might tell us upon deeper investigation. The community poured out to hear what the students had to say. We packed the church parsonage in 2017 and, in 2018, we were invited to make the presentations a part of a local celebration of local hero Frederick Douglass’ 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, which also included a communal reading and discussion of his famous “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” speech. These

presentations and our frequent presence at block parties and other events have helped to build a more concrete understanding in the community of what archaeology can do and, more importantly, what they want it to do for them.

We are beginning to get to a point where there is broad appreciation for the potential of archaeological research in specific. In 2017, Carlene Phoenix asked me to come with her to confront a relic hunter looting Asbury Church's property. When the Buffalo Soldier Home was lifted in 2018 to dig a complete foundation for the renovation, the contractor dug out a third of the site with a backhoe and I received calls from three concerned community members who were seeing the site being destroyed in front of them. The ground surface alone was littered with faunal material and glassware and I did a surface collection during a three-day stretch of rain that forced the digging to stop. But three days later the rest of the site got backhoed out and it no longer has any archaeological integrity. We had no role in the planning of the renovation; archaeology is still an afterthought. But people in Easton are coming to know archaeology and they know what they want it to do for them.

There are several projects underway at the moment that will flesh out the archaeology of The Hill and provide solid, compelling narratives to replace the flimsy superlative notion of what is significant about The Hill. In 2017, we discovered garden beds dating to ca. 1800 at the site occupied then by James and Henny Freeman. We collected pollen samples in 2018 and the community eager to know the results so that they can create a memorial garden plot in the community garden on South Street representing the plants that the Freemans grew two centuries ago. Yvonne Freeman pushed for Historic Easton to contribute funding toward the expenses of these soil analyses, which began in January 2020. As Asbury Church prepares for more renovations in the spring of 2020, Mrs. Phoenix is keen to know what features and artifacts

might lie underneath the Asbury Church floor and what they might tell us about church architecture and worship practices when the floor is taken up and replaced. Finally, this dissertation itself collects much of the story of The Hill into one place. Making this document accessible to the general public will be an important next step in solidifying the gains this project has achieved.

Part of the process of writing this dissertation has been sharing findings with residents of The Hill and members of the African-American community that extends beyond, but is intimately connected to, this place. The approach I have taken in this regard is to share the archaeological and historical facts that have emerged from the excavations and my archival research to put archaeological data into historical contexts, then seeking open conversations with members of the local and descendant community about what these discoveries mean to them in the present. In November 2019, I organized an evening reading and discussion of several of the newspaper articles from Chapter 2 I sent the complete archive, along with summaries of each article, to Carlene Phoenix, Priscilla Morris, and Yvonne Freeman with the invitation that they help me make a smaller sub-selection of articles to use in the event. They did not return any thoughts or selections. So I made a selection of sixteen articles representing several themes: poetry written by free African Americans in Easton; the limits and hurdles that free African Americans faced; education; religion; and toys and childhood. I also drew up a list of questions to promote discussion. Phoenix reserved the fellowship hall at Asbury for the occasion. Yvonne Freeman actively recruited for the event, hoping that others would share her enthusiasm. On the evening we had planned, a dozen people, mostly African-American women, came to take part. I handed out copies of the readings and we took turns reading each article, then considering what to make of it.

Many of the questions that participants brought had to do with the particulars of the stories in these articles. They wanted to know more about the authors, about people named in the stories, and about what had happened to them. For the lay audience with the closest ties to this history, the prime importance remains the individuals and families that lived on or visited The Hill and their personal stories. This history must be local before it can be anything broader. Near the end of the evening, after the final article, Morris asked me to give an update on my dissertation. I chose to summarize the section on young girls and teawares in chapter 2, which I had just finished drafting. I described how the newspapers conveyed middle-class ideals of domesticity that mismatched with the reality of black women's lives, which did not reflect that division between home and work that characterized the cult of domesticity. I talked about how newspapers and toy tea artifacts demonstrated African-American women's familiarity with that ideal even if it lay beyond their reach at the time. In the discussion that followed, the assembled group brought their own experiences with housewifery and motherwork to extend the discussion beyond the nineteenth century and confirm the ways in which Euro- and African-American women's experiences of work and domesticity diverged and diverge considerably. Ted Muller<sup>40</sup> noted that his first wife was a housewife, indicating that the practice continued until much more recently than I had implied. Tenny Sener pointed out that there was a lot of work to be done at the house and someone had to do it, historically. He meant that, before modern home appliances, it was only natural that someone had to spend most of their time cooking and cleaning, etc., and that it was common for this to be allocated as women's work. Priscilla Morris began to question

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<sup>40</sup> All participants gave oral consent for the inclusion in this study of their contributions to the conversation. Because I recorded the conversation in audio but not in video and because I was focused on leading the discussion rather than taking notes, I am able to identify directly the contributions of the longstanding, active members of Historic Easton and The Hill Community Project whose voices I recognize; I am not able to name all of the participants in the discussion.

whether the division of labor was equitable, replying that “There’s probably a few women in the room who can attest to going out and working all day and coming home and carrying a little more than half the load.” Up to this point, only (and all of) the white people in the room had spoken and the image of the past they depicted was one of divided, gendered labor.

But here the conversation took a turn. Another participant (a black woman) countered the image that was forming in the discussion: “Nobody in my family *ever* stayed home. I’ve never known any woman at any time in my family to stay at home as a housewife. They always worked. My grandparents always worked. My grandmother had ten kids and she worked outside the home.” Mr. Muller’s instinctual “Wow” betrayed the extent to which he had never considered how uncommon his own experience had been. The woman continued, “So I never knew about housewives. [I’d] only see it on TV.” Mrs. Phoenix further complicated the picture:

And then there was always the ones that, if they did stay home, they did bring in money, whether it was doing other people’s laundry...’Cause I can remember—Port Street—I can remember people comin’ with laundry...They made money. Even if they were in the home, they did contribute towards the household financially.

At Mrs. Phoenix’s comment, a chorus of “Uh-huhs” and “Mm-hmms” ricocheted around the group as black women in the room began listing names of people they knew who had done that kind of work. The African-American women present had spoken their story and their truth, one that mirrored what I had found in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archaeological and written record.

The unity with which the African-American women in the room and my own findings spoke to the pervasiveness of black women’s work outside the home became a teaching moment for the white men in the room. Mr. Muller asked if that was a rural phenomenon. Several black women in the room replied, almost at once, together, that no, it took place right here in Easton.

Mr. Muller said he would consider Easton to be a rural place, compared to his growing up in Baltimore. Mrs. Phoenix reiterated: “We were probably the only family that were married and had a mother and father living together. Now, a lot of my people in my neighborhood were raised by single mothers. So it was a difference. These mothers, they couldn’t stay home. They had to go in to work.” Another woman added that, even when black women stayed home, it was often only a temporary arrangement. “Well I’m from Trappe and my father had his own business and my mother—she was a schoolteacher back in the 1900s because she went to Hampton...” She described how her parents moved to New York because they weren’t paying her mother enough as a teacher. She then says her mother became a housewife and stayed in the home until her youngest child was in school. “That’s when she got a job. Other than that, she was a housewife. And she worked in the business—because my father owned a junkyard, so she did all the paperwork.” Carlene Phoenix added that her mother similarly stayed at home until Carlene’s youngest brother was in school and then went to work at the hospital. Although some of the white participants viewed middle-class gendered domesticity as a historical norm—and deviations from it as an urban-rural divide—the conversation and, particularly, the testimony of African-American women participants highlighted race as an important point of divergence in historical and recent experience. As the conversation wound down to a close, it became clear that the personal experiences of the participants corroborated my findings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reverse was also true: the archaeological and historical data had justified and contextualized the personal, individual experiences of those present. They had also provided a starting point for a conversation in which these African-American women, by confirming and building on each other’s testimony, had narrated their own story, if only to a room of a dozen people.

What took place in the fellowship hall of Asbury Church during our discussion of nineteenth-century newspapers was a process of reconnecting with heritage that brought together people who are interested in The Hill's heritage and in safeguarding the future of that heritage so that The Hill continues to be a place the struggle for racial equality and opportunity can continue. This is not an easy task. It requires today the building of mutual understanding and shared goals among neighbors just as it did for previous generations. This is the process of community-building and community revitalization. In the past, it meant reuniting African-American families, making social connections through work or religious activities, seeking out alliances with well-dispositioned white neighbors for the securing of wills or deeds. It meant pooling resources to build schools and churches. Today, heritage has become a ground for community-building.

The future of The Hill's heritage, its story, and its people will rest on placing solidly defined research findings into the hands of community members and their leaders. In the summer of 2019, Cindy Schmidt and I completed a walking tour brochure and interpretive signage for the neighborhood, working with Cassandra Vanhooser of the Talbot County Office of Tourism and Development. Having detailed findings from the project, along with the results of upcoming research that members of the community have specifically requested, available freely and easily to the general public will solidify The Hill's significance in years to come when the University of Maryland is no longer an active, visible presence. It will thereby safeguard the revitalization project that we were invited to support with our research. Of course, the long-term vitality of the existing community here will depend on a lot of things, including the local economy, that are bigger than our project could take on. In the meantime, Phoenix tells me that the community has its pride back. She and others have been giving tours of the neighborhood to



local schoolchildren who are coming to appreciate the heritage that was for so long ignored and which could very easily have been lost forever. And the archaeology we've done has helped to spark an outpouring of storytelling within the community that goes far beyond artifacts and excavations (personal interview with Carlene Phoenix, December 17, 2019). The relationship between the community and archaeology has evolved over the course of this project—after all, community archaeology is a process. And I have no doubt that the stories in this dissertation will continue to have a social life in Easton after this dissertation is completed as residents use them to meet local needs.

## Conclusion

African-American history in the United States tends often to be a linear narrative from slavery to freedom, with the major shift articulated by the Civil War. Therefore, most conceptions of the roots of African-American culture look to the plantation fields and the slave quarter. However, on The Hill and in places like it, those African Americans who were able to live free before the Civil War laid much of the groundwork for African-American culture that carried on once their neighbors, relatives, and friends also became free. The preceding chapters have charted some of these foundations for today's African-American culture as they took shape in Easton. The black culture that emerged here in the late eighteenth century and continued to develop in the subsequent generations was one of nuclear families supported by extended kinship networks and pursued in the face of early death through remarriage and adoption. It was a collective raising of children that took advantage of the literacy of certain members of the community and strove to bring up each generation with the skills they needed to succeed in a society that was often set against their success. It was a striving for middle-class status, but on African-Americans' own terms, even though that status was often out of reach. It was the black church and the black preacher, a distinctive style of worship outside of and even within the mainstream Methodist church. It was a dedication to education and better opportunities for each upcoming generation than the previous one had had. And it was a collective conversation about the deeds of community members, past and present, that curated a sense of memory and place. This culture sustained African Americans in Easton while slavery continued to exist around them and through the years of Jim Crow and Segregation.

The everyday culture that they crafted as individuals, families, congregations, and as a community and in concert with other free African-American communities elsewhere fueled the struggles of abolition, integration, and Civil Rights. African-American culture is rooted in the slave quarter, yes. But it is also rooted in the first home a family managed to own for themselves, in the carpenter's or blacksmith's shop that held Methodist class meetings, in the small schoolhouses that black communities built for themselves with their own money scrimped and saved in the smallest of increments, working together until the job was done. It is time for these places, too, to take their place in the story of black America. And it is time that we build preservation strategies around nurturing the heritage that these previous generations laid so that it can continue into the future.

One common theme in all of the preceding chapters has been the extent of collaboration, mutual support, and collective action among African Americans, sometimes with support from white people. The process of resisting oppressive forces of slavery and racism necessarily involved working together, from the buying of family members out of bondage to the forming of trustee committees to oversee church buildings to the teaching of one another's children. Commonalities of identity and experience formed the basis for shared goals. Communal activities strengthened these bonds and hardwired survival and resistance strategies into everyday life. This is the process of community-building.

The process of community among African Americans in Easton from the late eighteenth century to the present has involved many overlapping communities. There was the African-American community, linked by shared cultural heritage and historical experience in the New World and by the common treatment they received according to the color of their skin by the systems of power. Within this was the free African-American community, designated by their

particular legal status and sometimes by shared multiracial backgrounds. This community coalesced locally and nationally around addressing the particular forms of racism that they faced. There were families bonded by blood and marriage, sometimes across the line of slavery. Family ties often bound African Americans who did not live on The Hill to those who did. There were religious communities that began as Methodist class meetings and grew into two congregations, bound by shared religious beliefs and collective worship practices. These were connected through Methodist connection with broader regional and national communities of black and white Methodists. The symbols of the religious community are those of Christianity, its relationships those of the church family and the Methodist connection, renewed at each service. There were the educational communities of the Sunday-school class and of the Easton Colored School/Moton School, whose common language was the teacher-student dynamic and the textbook and the diploma. There was the community of veterans, which formalized into the Blake Blackstone American Legion Post in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And there are other communities that I have not had space to fully appreciate here: workplace communities, social clubs and fraternal organizations like the Elks, the American Legion, and Graham's Hall, informal networks of mutual support between women, and underground economies. Each of these communities had its own regular social relationships, terminology, shared understandings, and collective values

The free African-American community was made up by the interactions between all these communities. As they emerged from slavery, the first generations of free African Americans in Easton and the generations that followed them constructed in these forms of community to sustain support networks in a world where their freedom still had limits. The languages and relationships of each of these communities gave shape to various strategies for racial uplift: the

property owner renting the back of their lot to a less-well-off friend and neighbor, the literate man reading moral lessons to her sister's children from an African-American newspaper she had borrowed from her church pastor, the wife polishing her husband's military uniform buttons so they would shine when he wore it for special occasions to commemorate his service, the older child helping her teacher prepare her classroom for the next year's students, and many, many more. These communities played major roles in the everyday life and development of Easton through more than two centuries and the everyday life that people lived through their various communities left written and archaeological records that we have sometimes been able to read and interpret.

Community is ever an ongoing process of inscription, negotiation, and reinscription. The Hill Community Project has involved several overlapping and interacting communities, including the descendant community, the local community, and the scholarly community. The descendant community is made up by the members of longstanding African-American families in Easton, many of whom can trace their residence on or around The Hill back for generations. Some of these family members have moved away from Easton and others have returned, stretching the descendant community across sometimes great distances. Modern communication and the internet have made it possible for even the furthest-flung members of these families to keep up with research findings and to share their own memories of The Hill with one another.

The local community includes all the residents who live on The Hill and nearby in Easton and Talbot County. Some are African Americans and many are not. Some belong to families who have lived in the area for generations and some have just moved here recently. Local residents have consistently made up the largest group of participants in tours of The Hill by Dale Green or myself. Residents and landowners gave permission for archaeological excavations and

the Talbot County Women's Club, composed mostly of retired white women, has taken the most active role in curating their artifact collection, selecting several pieces for display cases and bringing researchers from our project to speak to their members. A handful of residents have volunteered to help with research or to house students. Chris Polk and other *Star-Democrat* reporters have kept residents informed about the project and helped to announce public meetings and excavations. Local government has become deeply engaged with the project, including Cassandra Vanhooser and Candace Harris from the Talbot County Office of Tourism and Development and Mayor Robert Willey and town planner Lynn Thomas of Easton. The project has also helped to link local schoolchildren with their elders through classroom projects and field trips.

The Hill Community Project has also engaged a broad scholarly community. Dale Green tapped his colleagues at Morgan State University for oral history work and a Small Area Plan for the Town of Easton. Archaeology graduate students at the University of Maryland, even those whose own research focused on other sites in other places, devoted their time and energy to The Hill. Many of us have presented our research in Easton to the broader field of historical archaeologists. Most of these scholars outside the core project research team have moved on with their professional lives, applying their experiences working on The Hill to other research projects. Meanwhile, the project has forged collaborations among local researchers and has combined the local depth of knowledge of people who have been anchored in Talbot County their whole lives with the institutional resources of the larger universities.

In these ways, The Hill Community Project has convened its own community of sorts by bringing descendants, residents, and scholars together around our shared interest in The Hill's heritage. As archaeologist John Carman (2011:496) points out, archaeological projects regularly

create “‘community’ interest” through the process of establishing value around the past and its debitage and attracting historically-minded people around a particular site in a way that did not occur before the arrival of professional scholars. Archaeology in public is thus often an act of community-building. The community that has come together around The Hill in the last several years is not the same community (or communities) that existed there before the start of this project. However, it has grown out of these other communities and they have had an impact on it.

Since 2012, archaeologists have become fixtures on The Hill with our annual gaggles of field-school students making their way from the Asbury parsonage to the various excavation sites every day and through my own periodic visits throughout the year. I would not venture to say that we have become part of the local community, though Easton residents and Asbury Church, through its parsonage, have at various times provided housing for some of our students. We have certainly not become members of the descendant community. But my colleagues, my students, and I have forged solid relationships with various stakeholders over these several years. By taking on their cause of preserving and revitalizing The Hill, we have entered into community with these partners. Doing so has been a thoroughly rewarding experience. The Hill Community Project stands as an example of what can be accomplished when archaeologists devote our knowledge, our skills, and our resources to the service of others on terms developed not by us but by the people we serve.

## Appendix A

### Census Data for Talbot County and Easton, by Race, 1790-2010

Census data for this analysis comes from several sources: scans of original records, transcripts made by the USGenWeb Project, and official Census Bureau summary publications. Preference is given for the most direct, original source available within reasonable constraints of effort, in the above order. The references given in this table correspond to all census data for the respective year that is used in this dissertation, unless specified otherwise in the text.

For 1790, the data used in this dissertation is based off of the USGenWeb transcript (USDS 1790b), which is itself based on a transcript for 1790 that the Census Bureau issued in 1907 (USBC 1907). However, both transcripts were found to contain several numerical errors. These have been corrected through a line-by-line check against the original scans (USDS 1790a). Some damage to the scans affects fewer than ten households in both the transcript and the data used here. The names of heads of households were not checked. The totals for the several demographic columns in this census do not match those that are given for each census district by the census taker himself at the end of each district. The discrepancy is larger than the error introduced by the damage to the pages. The census-taker's district totals are the basis for all subsequent United States Census Bureau calculations, such as those tracking change in the county over several censuses (e.g. United States Department of the Interior 1870:36). However, as I believe those sums to be in error, I have used my own numbers based on the line entries rather than the district totals.

There is some disagreement as to the utility of the census for assessing the free "colored" population before 1820. During the 1790, 1800, and 1810 censuses, populations were divided between free white males of varying ages, free white females of varying ages, "all other free persons," and slaves. The meaning of "all other free persons" is up to some measure of debate. Cynthia Schmidt has consistently argued that the column includes free white persons bound under apprenticeships for a period of years. For an example, she points to James Price, who lived in Talbot Lane in Easton, at what is now the Talbot County Women's Club site, who was recorded to have had at least two white apprentices learning his trade as the register of wills. In 1800, the census lists him as a single white male living with three "other free persons." Price was not known at the time to have lived with or employed any free people of color, so Schmidt interprets the census record as including his white apprentices under the "other free persons" heading. However, a reading of the instructions for the census-takers in 1790 suggests that the column was intended for use in recording free non-white residents. The Congress directed census-takers to enumerate the population, excluding Indians and "distinguishing free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, from all others; distinguishing also the sexes and colours of free persons" (United States Congress 1845:101). Grammatically, this phrasing indicates that free people were first set apart, and then separated by race. It suggests to me that this column is dedicated to free people of African descent. If this is the case, then the column in 1790, 1800, and 1810 may be paired with later data on the free African-American population. The resulting trends appear to be believable.



Census data for the antebellum period were drawn primarily from GenWeb transcripts, which were available through 1860, except in certain cases. In 1800, preference was given to the summary document (USDS 1800a) for the overall picture of county population in Figure 1.1 and the table in this appendix. Detailed data from the GenWeb transcript (USDS 1800b) are used in the subsequent analyses throughout Chapter 1. For 1810 and 1820, the GenWeb transcripts (USDS 1810; USDS 1820) were used throughout. The data for Easton from 1820 can be extracted from the Talbot County data in the GenWeb transcript, where it occurs on pages 9a–15a. For 1830, data throughout the dissertation were drawn from the GenWeb transcript (USDS 1830a), which was checked in certain places against the original scans (USDS 1830b) for suspected errors that became relevant to the analyses in Chapter 1.

In 1832, the Talbot County Court (1832) conducted a census of the free African-American population in the county. I have included the total in the table in this appendix. However, a preliminary check of a transcript that was made available to me by a colleague turned up several transcription errors. Transcribing this document anew has not been possible within the scope of this study. Therefore, I have not been able to include detailed analyses of these data or to check the accuracy of some of the analyses of this 1832 census in Dorsey's (2011) work.

For 1840, the GenWeb transcript was incomplete. Much of the data on African Americans, specifically, are missing from the transcript's later pages. Therefore, I have relied on the summary document (USDS 1841) for county totals but have not been able to include more detailed analyses in Chapter 1 of the population in this year. I have included a tentative gender and sex profile of the population for 1840 in Figure 1.10, based on the partial data in the transcript.

The numbers presented in Chapter 1 and in this appendix for the Talbot County population totals in 1850 are derived from the summary document published by the United States Department of the Interior (USDI 1853). While complete transcripts are available from the US GenWeb Project (USDI 1850a) for the white and free African-American population and from FamilySearch (USDI 1850b) for the separate slave schedule, the numbers in these transcripts differ significantly from those in the 1853 summary report. While a more detailed record of the population containing full entries by individual is usually preferable for the sake of demographic analysis, the slave schedule transcript is incomplete and it is necessary to rely on the summary document. The transcription schedule of free people was also incomplete, with twenty pages missing. After transcribing this gap using the scanned records on FamilySearch, there is a disagreement between the two sources over numbers of white and of free "colored" people. The difference in the totals is 13 individuals. Out of a free population of 9677, this is a small discrepancy that does not change overage demographic shapes within the population. In the interest of accessing information of greater detail, the analysis in this chapter uses the transcript for data on free people and the summary document for statistics on the enslaved population in order to arrive at the total county population. The town data for Easton for 1850 are drawn from the GenWeb transcript (USDI 1850a).

As in 1850, the 1860 census reported enslaved people on a separate schedule. I have drawn from the GenWeb transcript (USDI 1860a) for the data on white and free African-American residents of Talbot County and on the scanned original records (USDI 1860b) for the

counts of enslaved residents. Easton is recognizable in both documents (USDI 1860a:1–27; USDI 1860b).

After 1860s, I did not have access to ready transcripts of the data. The genealogy website FamilySearch accompanies their scans of the original pages with partial transcripts, but these are not generally sufficient for the analyses in Chapter 1. Therefore, I undertook limited transcription of the data on my own for 1870 and 1910 for the town of Easton. Further transcription was beyond the scope of this study. The totals included in this appendix and in Figure 1.1 for census years 1870 through 2010 are based on totals given in the summary documents (USDI 1872:36,164; USDI 1883:395; USDI 1895:24,381,415,460; USDI 1901:xlvi,197,542; USBC 1913:846,849; USBC 1922:426,428; USBC 1932:1056,1060; USBC 1943:537,563; USBC 1952:46,56; USBC 1961:46,66; USBC 1973:98,104; USBC 1982:21,186; USBC 1990:13,21; USBC 2002:46–47,69,72; USBC 2012:68–69,105).

Year	Sample Size	Total Population	White Population	African-American Population	Free African-American Population	Enslaved Population	Other
1790	Talbot County	12877	7262 56 %	5615 44 %	1082 8 %	4533 35 %	
1800	Talbot County	13436	7070 53 %	6366 47 %	1591 12 %	4775 36 %	
1810	Talbot County	14182	7166 51 %	7016 49 %	2133 15 %	4883 34 %	
1820	Talbot County	14489	7511 52 %	6978 48 %	2239 15 %	4739 33 %	
1820	Easton	1776	1108 62 %	668 38 %	336 19 %	332 19 %	
1830	Talbot County	12886	6273 49 %	6613 51 %	2484 19 %	4129 32 %	
1832	Talbot County				1902		
1840	Talbot County	12090	6063 50 %	6027 50 %	2340 19 %	3687 30 %	
1850	Talbot County	13811	7097 51 %	6714 49 %	2580 19 %	4134 30 %	
1850	Easton		778		340		
1860	Talbot County	14795	8102 55 %	6693 45 %	2968 20 %	3725 25 %	
1860	Easton	1357	795 59 %	562 41 %	309 23 %	253 19 %	
1870	Talbot County	16137	9471 59 %	6666 41 %			
1870	Easton	2110	1198 57 %	912 43 %			
1880	Talbot County	19059	11730 62 %	7329 38 %			
1880	Easton	3005					5 0 %
1890	Talbot County	19736	12248 62 %	7483 38 %			
1890	Easton	2939	1795 61 %	1143 39 %			1 0 %
1900	Talbot County	20342	12875 63 %	7466 37 %			1 0 %
1900	Easton	3074	2049 67 %	1024 33 %			1 0 %
1910	Talbot County	19620	12841 65 %	6774 35 %			5 0 %
1910	Easton	3083	2211 72 %	872 28 %			2 0 %
1920	Talbot County	18306	12138 66 %	6165 34 %			3 0 %

Year	Sample Size	Total Population	White Population	African-American Population	Free African-American Population	Enslaved Population	Other
1920	Easton	3442	2537 74 %	904 26 %			1 0 %
1930	Talbot County	18583	12627 68 %	5943 32 %			13 0 %
1930	Easton	4098	3071 75 %	1021 25 %			0 0 %
1940	Talbot County	18784	13048 69 %	5732 31 %			4 0 %
1940	Easton	4528	3420 76 %	1108 24 %			0 0 %
1950	Talbot County	19428	14154 73 %	5264 27 %			10 0 %
1950	Easton	4863	3711 76 %	1122 23 %			3 0 %
1960	Talbot County	21578	15717 73 %	5852 27 %			9 0 %
1960	Easton	6337	4936 78 %	1393 22 %			6 0 %
1970	Talbot County	23682	17925 76 %	5737 24 %			20 0 %
1970	Easton	6809	5181 76 %	1625 24 %			3 0 %
1980	Talbot County	25604	20082 78 %	5449 21 %			73 0 %
1980	Easton	7536	5439 72 %	2069 27 %			28 0 %
1990	Talbot County	30549	24833 81 %	5502 18 %			214 1 %
1990	Easton	9372	6739 72 %	2512 27 %			121 1 %
2000	Talbot County	33812	27944 83 %	5313 16 %			637 2 %
2000	Easton	11708	8490 73 %	2779 24 %			595 5 %
2010	Talbot County	37782	31302 83 %	5148 14 %			2300 6 %
2010	Easton	15945	11971 75 %	2895 18 %			1764 11 %

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<sup>41</sup> Although no author's name is attached to the article, the text states that it is written "by the author of 'Charles Auchester.'" This is Elizabeth Sara Sheppard.

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